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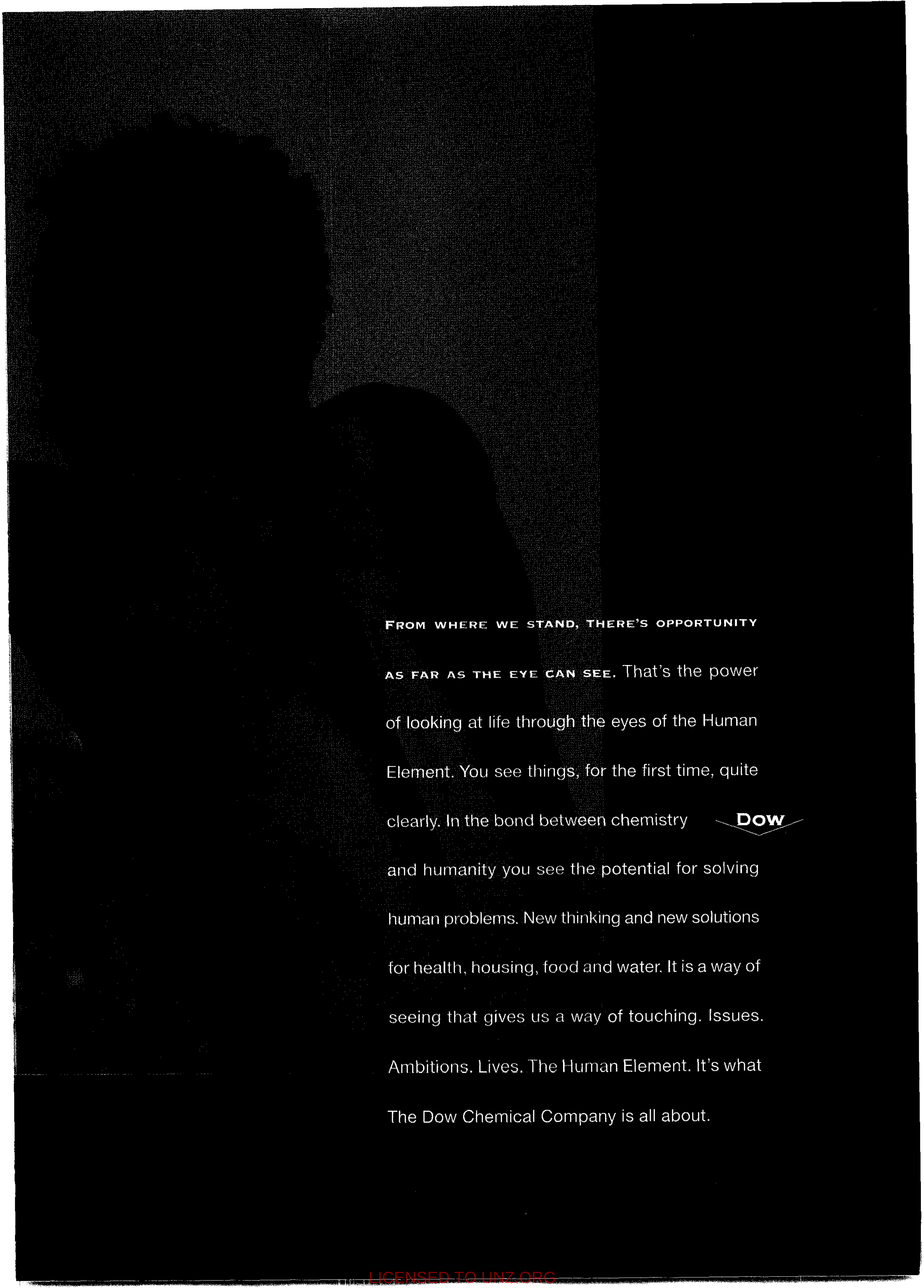

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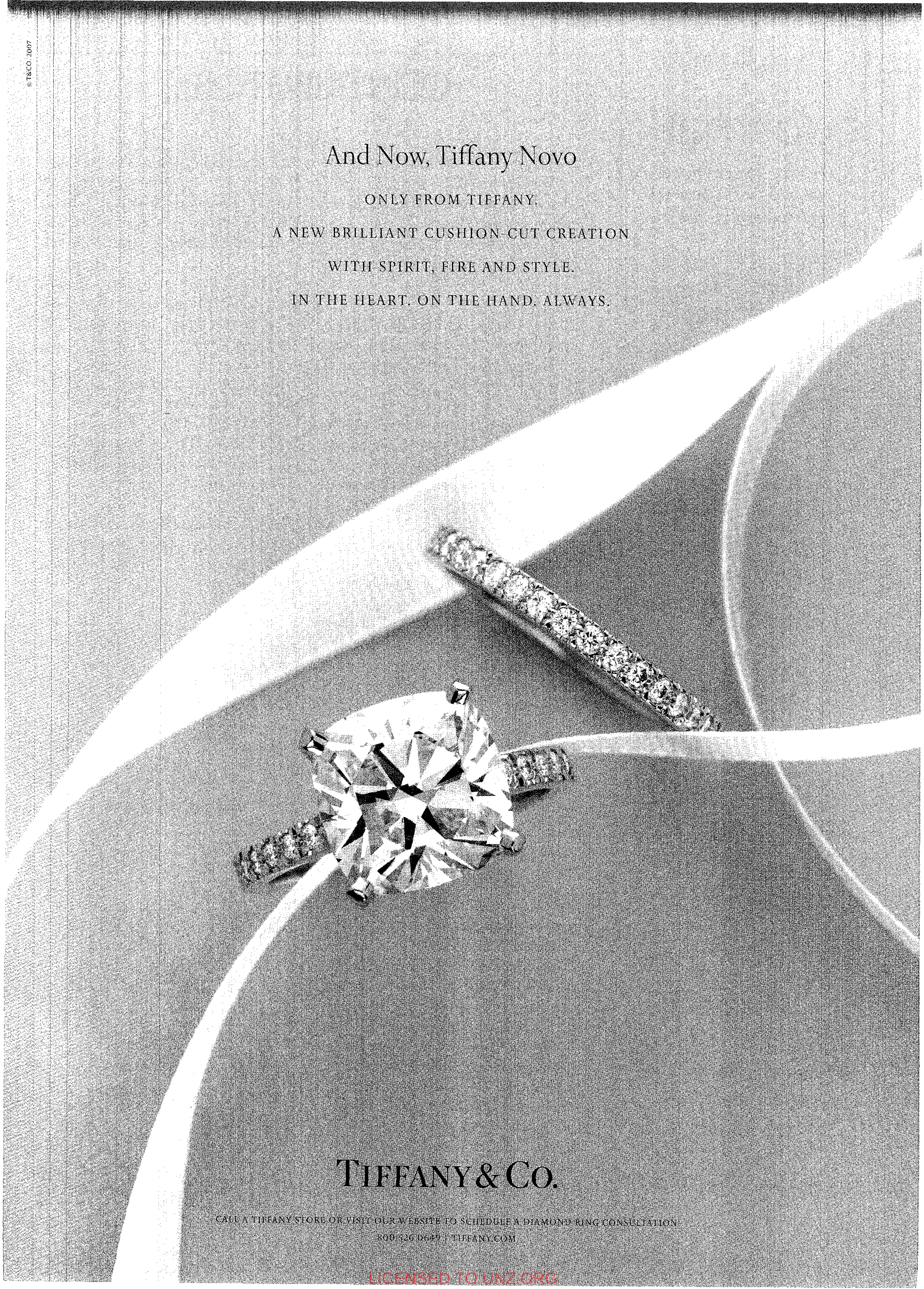
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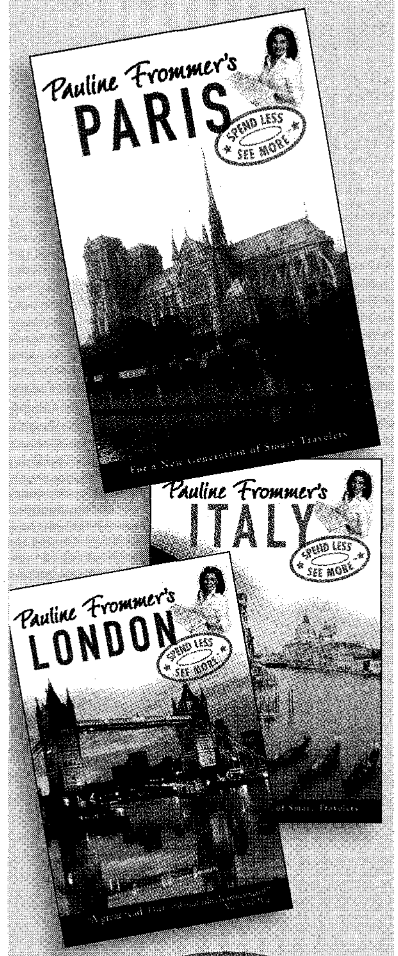

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John Lahr ("The Impersonator," p. 34) is the magazine's senior drama critic. "Petrified," an article that appeared in the August 28, 2006, issue, is included in "The Best American Essays 2007," which comes out later this year.

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Atul Gawande ("The Way We Age Now," p. 50) is assistant professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School. His book "Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance" has just been published.

Alex Ross ("The Anti-Maestro," p. 60), the magazine's music critic, will publish "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century" in October.

Richard Rayner (Fiction, p. 72) is the author of five works of fiction, including "The Devil's Wind." He has a nonfiction book, "The Associates: How Four Capitalists Created California," coming out next January.

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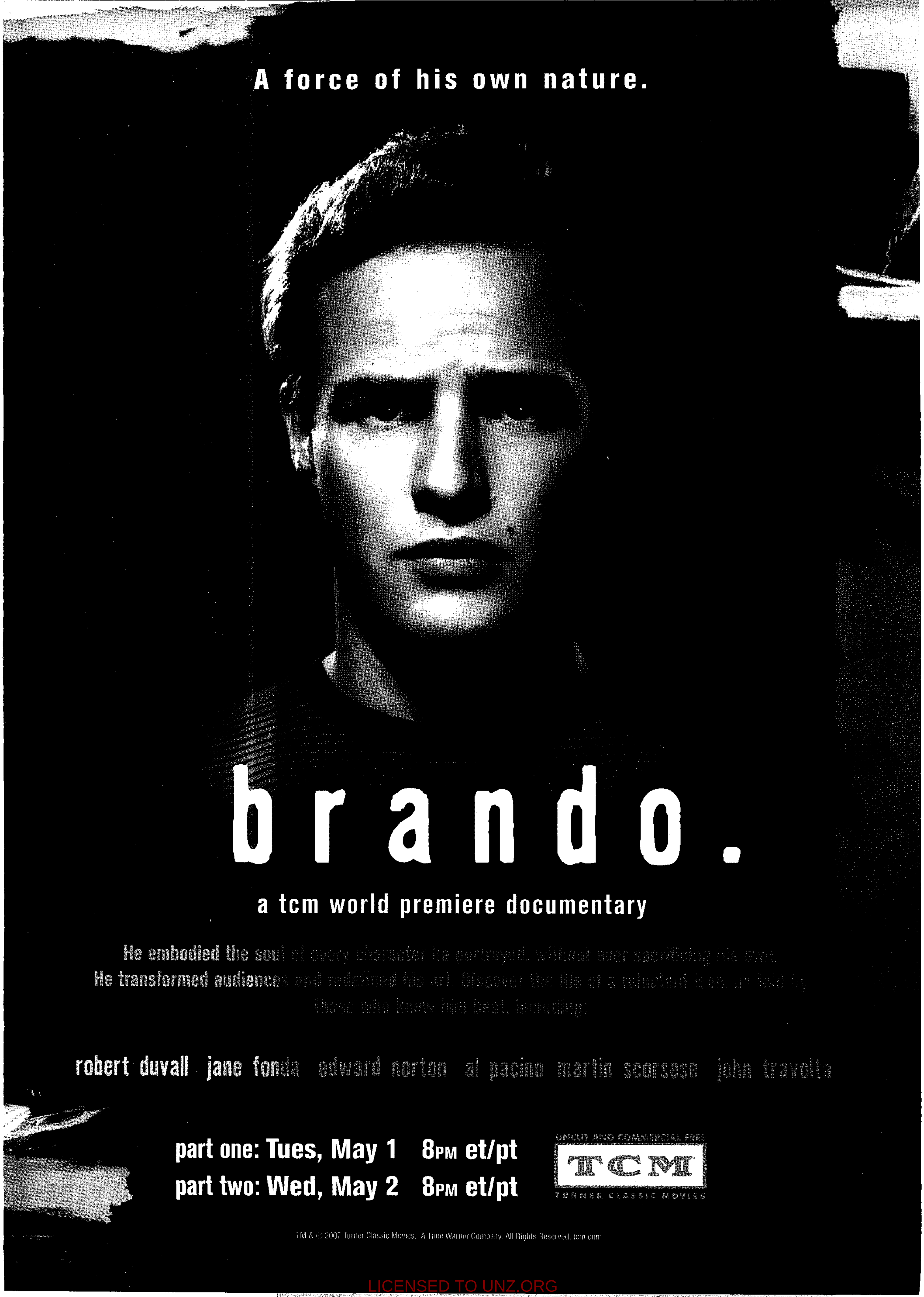
Joyce Carol Oates (Books, p. 84) published "After the Wreck, I Picked Myself Up, Spread Wings and Flew Away" and "Black Girl/White Girl" last year.

Paul Goldberger (The Talk of the Town, p. 28; The Sky Line, p. 86), the magazine's architecture critic, holds the Joseph Urban Chair in Design and Architecture at the New School.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
A clip from Barbara Stanwyck's 1941 film "Ball of Fire." / A slide show of photographs of the Nelson-Atkins extension, by *David S. Allee.* / *Dan Baum* throws pies at a parade, and more daily dispatches from New Orleans. / *Alex Ross* picks his favorite Esa-Pekka Salonen recordings. / From the archives: *Adam Gopnik* on Columbine, *Anthony Lane* on Preston Sturges, *Dorothy Parker* on Aimee Semple McPherson, and more. / A selection of articles from the current issue. / Video versions of animated cartoons; the caption contest; and a list of *New Yorker* events across the country.



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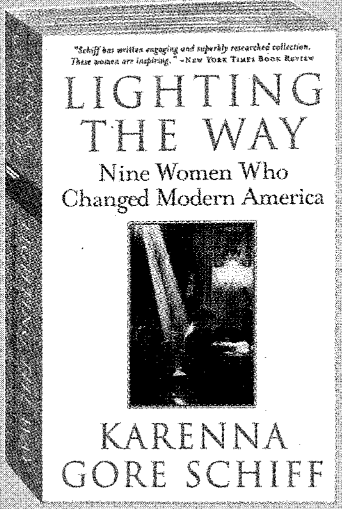
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THE RULES OF LANGUAGE

John Colapinto, in his article about the Pirahã and their language, paints a lively picture of the "passionate debate" provoked by Daniel Everett's claim that Pirahã grammar is "constrained" by Pirahã culture ("The Interpreter," April 16th). The article mentions our joint work on Pirahã grammar but omits what we actually discovered. To determine what, if anything, was truly different about Pirahã, we carefully examined all the available evidence, including the most recent work. We found much that was interesting about Pirahã, but virtually every point turned out to have precedents in languages spoken in cultures that have none of the features attributed to the Pirahã. We concluded that the Pirahã language actually demonstrates a striking *independence* of linguistic structure and culture. No matter how "different" from us the Pirahã may seem, we believe that their language follows the same general laws as languages spoken all over the planet and is (like every language) built from a novel combination of familiar building blocks. For example, Pirahã forms questions as Chinese does and positions its subordinate clauses much as German does. And, when questions and subordinate clauses come together in one sentence, the language deals with this just as Bengali does. No matter how different our various cultures may be, we do have in common a basic, law-governed capacity for language.

Andrew Nevins
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

David Pesetsky
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Mass.

Cilene Rodrigues
Universidade Estadual de Campinas
Campinas, Brazil

In a conversation with Colapinto, quoted in his article, I attempted to address whether the Pirahã might be collectively mentally retarded because of inbreeding in their small, isolated communities. I wanted to emphasize that any clinical physical or behavioral signs of such were markedly absent. Unfortunately, in trying to make this point, I referred to a kind of "Appalachian inbreeding" situation—attempting to make a colorful analogy to the movie "Deliverance." However, the implication that there is any kind of widespread mental retardation in the Appalachian community has been extremely offensive and deeply hurtful. To the extent that my remarks have added to these negative and untrue stereotypes, I am deeply sorry and I extend my apologies to the people of Appalachia.

Peter Gordon
Columbia University
New York City

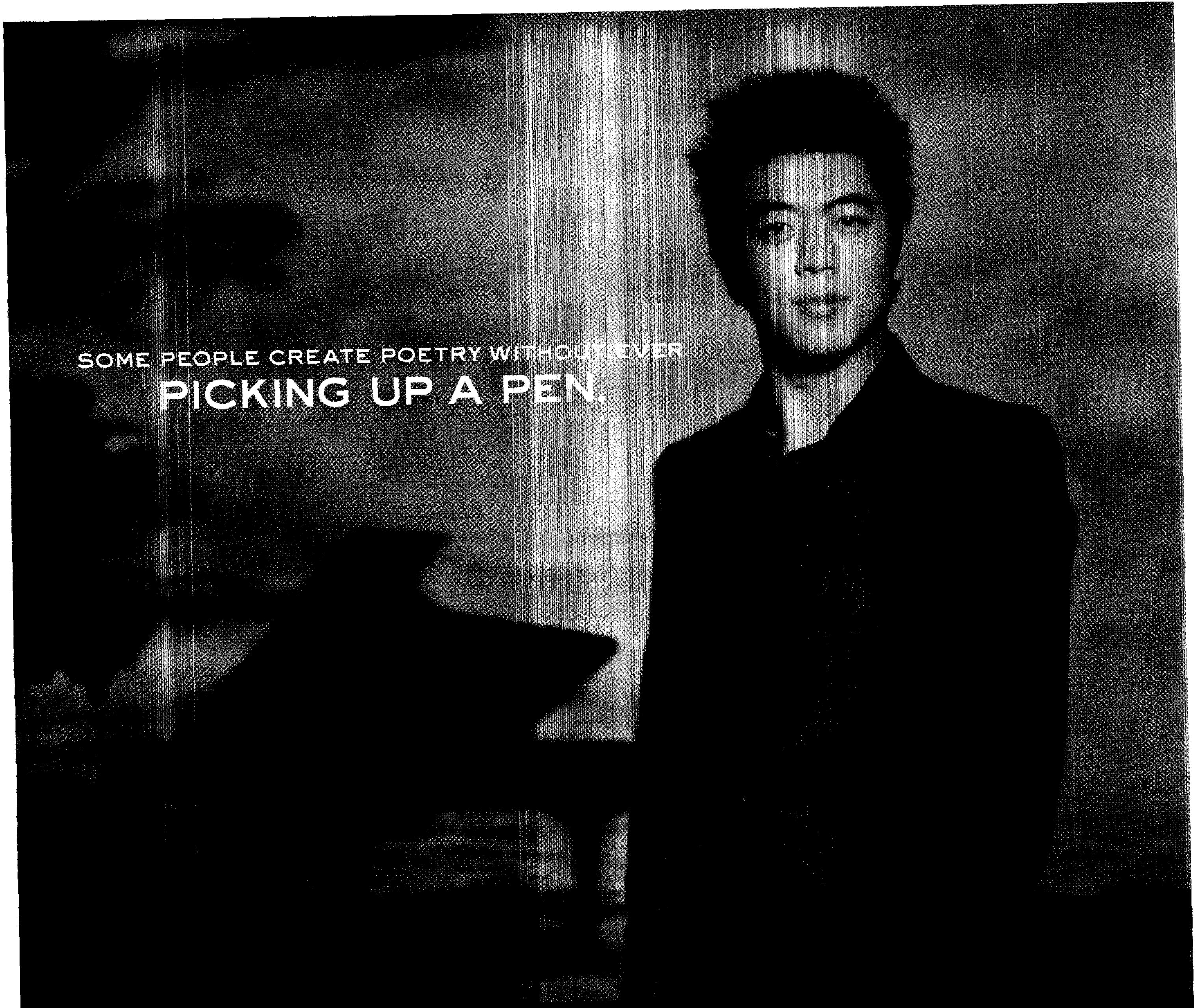
ON LOANS

James Surowiecki's diagnosis of the subprime industry's ills disregards clear signs of the industry's disease (The Financial Page, April 9th). Many subprime lenders prey on families seeking the American Dream, hiding costs and penalties, downplaying the effects of variable rates, and pressing unaffordable loans for the purchase of fraudulently overvalued homes. Moreover, many of these practices are racially targeted: African-Americans and Latinos are almost one-third more likely to get subprime loans than whites with comparable credit. There indeed may be a place for a subprime market that expands access to the American Dream. But not for one that spreads the disease of deception, exploitation, and discrimination.

Kumiki Gibson
Commissioner, New York State
Division of Human Rights
New York City

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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29	30	1	25	26	27	28

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
TOMBSTONE VISION

Charles Mingus's mammoth composition "Epitaph," a large ensemble work that was never performed in its entirety during the great jazz bassist's life and was last presented here nearly two decades ago, is revived at Rose Theatre. Gunther Schuller will be conducting more than thirty musicians, including the bassist Christian McBride (holding down Mingus's chair), in an expanded version of the epic. Bill Cosby is the host. (See page 17.)

ART
STREET CRED

Seventeen years' worth of Kevin Landers's dashing and witty photographs of the streets of New York City (filled, as they so often are, with brightly dressed shoppers, racks of rotisserie chickens, drifts of storm-gutter debris) are currently on view at the Elizabeth Dee gallery, in Chelsea. (See page 20.)

DANCE
LOVE IN THE AIR

New York City Ballet begins its spring season, which celebrates the centenary of Lincoln Kirstein, the man who brought Balanchine to America. The gala event on May 1 features a new full-length ballet, "Romeo + Juliet," choreographed by the company's director, Peter Martins. (See page 20.)

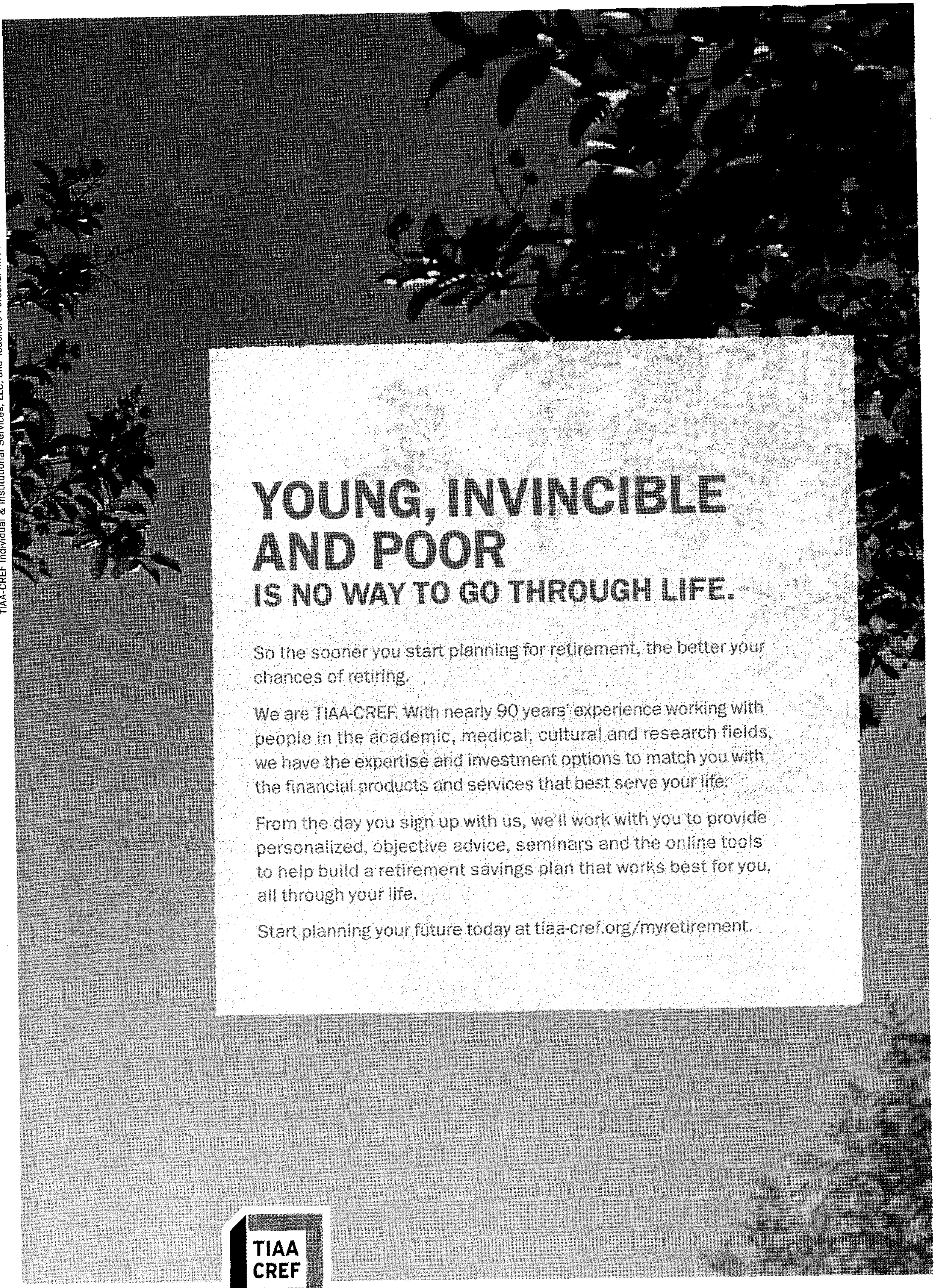
CLASSICAL MUSIC
MUSICAL PASSAGES

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center balances both tradition and modernity; the New York farewell concert of the splendid Vermeer String Quartet, which was founded in 1969, is followed by the première performances of the Sextet for Strings by Nicholas Maw. (See page 22.)

MOVIES
HOCUS-FOCUS

Georges Méliès, born in 1861, started as a cartoonist and magician and ended up selling toys in the Montparnasse train station. From 1896 to 1914, he made hundreds of short films with spectacular special effects. Many of his most famous works, including "A Trip to the Moon" (1902), are available on YouTube, but Anthology Film Archives permits them to be seen full-size. (See page 24.)

A New York Road Runners' track event for children. Photograph by Gus Powell.



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SPRING-SUMMER CULTURAL CALENDAR

Hofstra University • Hempstead, New York

What We Wear

April 16th–August 10th • hofstra.edu/museum

Hofstra's eye-catching exhibition of more than thirty garments and two dozen accessories, ranging from a man's Mongolian pointed hat to a woman's Nigerian *dansiki,* spans a variety of cultures and eras, underscoring the fact that while fashion may be fleeting, it nonetheless serves to define culture and delineate individual and collective identities.

Queens College • Flushing, New York

Light to Dark: Paintings and Works on Paper by Margery Edwards

April 17th–July 30th • qc.cuny.edu

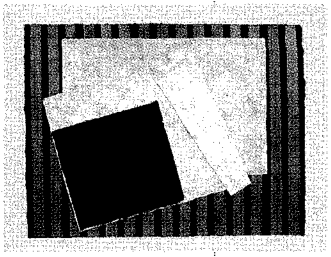
In 1975, when the artist Margery Edwards moved from her oceanfront home in Australia to a loft in Manhattan, she abandoned her bright palette to explore multifarious tones of black. When she died, in 1989, she left behind ethereal images that she had once described as "a progression through darkness and light."

Dartmouth College • Hanover, New Hampshire

29th Annual Festival of New Music, special guest the Barton Workshop

May 1st, 7 P.M. • hop.dartmouth.edu

Trombonist James Fulkerson conducts the Barton Workshop, an adventurous twelve-member new-music ensemble based in Amsterdam. The group headlines Dartmouth's avant-garde fête of electro-acoustic music, which will also have the college's faculty and students performing works of electronic improvisation on the forward fringe.



Queens College • Flushing, New York

Elmar Oliveira, violin

May 6th, 2 P.M. • kupferbergcenter.org

The first American violinist to win Moscow's prestigious International Tchaikovsky Competition, in 1978, Elmar Oliveira renders a disparate repertoire of contemporary works and rarely performed classical pieces along with the standard violin literature. The fifty-six-year-old virtuoso, who enjoys a successful recording career and performs with major symphonies worldwide, will appear in a recital setting.

The Ohio State University • Columbus

Peter Bjorn and John

May 7th, 9 P.M. • wexarts.org

This Stockholm trio flew under the indie-pop radar until last year's "Writer's Block," its third album, which was hailed as "a compact minor classic." With a sweet hint of the sixties' Mersey beat and a hip kitsch exemplified by the whistled melody of "Young Folks," Peter Bjorn and John merit the buzz.

Dartmouth College • Hanover, New Hampshire

Handel and Haydn Society of the Boston Chamber Ensemble

May 11th, 8 P.M. • hop.dartmouth.edu

Founded in Boston in 1815 and inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame in 2002, the Handel and Haydn Society's chamber group of strings, oboe, and fortepiano melds tradition and innovation in this program of two Mozart quartet pieces and a Beethoven work for piano trio.

American Repertory Theatre (Loeb Drama Center) • Cambridge, Massachusetts

"No Man's Land" Directed by David Wheeler

May 12th–June 10th (times vary) • amrep.org

Two aging writers, one successful and the other down-and-out, meet for an alcohol-infused night of witty banter and sinister power games in this tragicomedy by the Nobel Prize-winning playwright Harold Pinter.

The Ohio State University • Columbus

"Kings of the Sky"

May 17th, 7 P.M. • wexarts.org

Deborah Stratman introduces her 2004 documentary about the famed Uighur tightrope artist Adil Hoxur and his troupe as they tour villages throughout Chinese Turkistan. The film chronicles gravity-defying acts as well as the struggles of the Uighur, a Turkic-speaking Muslim people from Xinjiang province, to preserve their religious and political autonomy under the Chinese government.

Hofstra University • Hempstead, New York

"Carmen," presented by the Bronx Opera Company

May 18th, 8 P.M.; May 19th, 2 P.M. • hofstra.edu/culture

The celebrated opera "Carmen" is staged in composer Georges Bizet's original 1875 opéra-comique version, complete with spoken dialogue. The Bronx Opera Company's performance of the four-act masterpiece will be sung in English and feature a thirty-piece orchestra.

The Ohio State University • Columbus

The Mind of Maddin

May 25th, 7 P.M. • wexarts.org

Dubbed "the Canadian David Lynch," the surrealist filmmaker Guy Maddin returns to the Wexner Center to introduce not one of his cinematic gems but instead a classic film that has informed his own work: the 1943 masterpiece "Day of Wrath," by the Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer.

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AMERICAN FIESTA
Mark Brokaw directs this drama, about a Fiestaware collector from a conservative family, written by and starring Steven Tomlinson. In previews. Opens April 26. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

BEAUTY ON THE VINE
Epic Theatre Center presents a play by Zak Berkman, about the murder of a young female right-wing radio host. In previews. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE BRIG
The Living Theatre inaugurates its new performance space with a production of the 1963 play by Kenneth H. Brown, about atrocities committed in military prisons during the Korean War. Judith Malina directs. In previews. Opens April 26. (19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

CHURCH
A one-act play by Young Jean Lee ("Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven"), about her contentious relationship with Christianity. Opens April 26. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101.)

CORAM BOY
Helen Edmundson adapts Jamila Gavin's novel, about two orphans in eighteenth-century England. Melly Still directs the National Theatre production. In previews. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DEUCE
Angela Lansbury and Marian Seldes star in Terrence McNally's new play, in which champion tennis doubles partners reunite. Michael Blakemore directs. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DIXIE'S TUPPERWARE PARTY
Dixie Longate, a drag performer who became Tupperware's top salesperson, tells her story, in a play directed by Alex Timbers and written by Kris Andersson and Elizabeth Meriwether. In previews. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE FALL AND RISE OF THE RISING FALLEN
Banana Bag & Bodice presents a musical-theatre piece about a punk band called the Rising Fallen. Opens April 26. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101.)

110 IN THE SHADE
Roundabout Theatre Company's production of the musical by Harvey Schmidt, Tom Jones, and N. Richard Nash. Audra McDonald stars; Lonny Price directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

I LAND
Ma-Yi Theatre Company presents Keo Woolford's show about Hawaiian identity and hula dancing, with choreography by Rokafella and Robert Cazimero. In previews. Opens April 29. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL
A musical adaptation of the Reese Witherspoon film, about a sorority girl who ends up at Harvard Law School. Directed and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. In previews. Opens April 29. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

LOVEMUSIK
Michael Cerveris and Donna Murphy star in this musical, which chronicles the romance of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. With songs by Weill and a book by Alfred Uhry. Directed by Harold Prince. In previews. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

PASSING STRANGE
The singer-songwriter Stew wrote the book and lyrics to this musical, about a young black bohemian's search for himself. Annie Dorsen directs; with choreography by Karole Armitage. Previews begin May 1. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THE PRESIDENT AND HER MISTRESS
Abingdon Theatre Company presents the première of Jan Buttram's futuristic comedy, set in 2156, about a woman who must defend her Presidency. Rob Urbinati directs. Opens April 25. (312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

RADIO GOLF
The final installment of August Wilson's ten-play cycle set in Pittsburgh's Hill District is about an African-American politician's rise to prominence in 1997. Harry Lennix and Tonya Pinkins star; Kenny Leon directs. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

SMOKE AND MIRRORS
The première of a play by Joseph Goodrich, which follows a group of employees in the break room of their workplace. Nick Faust directs. In previews. Opens April 27. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

ALL THE WRONG REASONS
The comedian John Fugelsang was born to an ex-friar and an ex-nun, and his rage against Sunday-school morality runs so deep that he devotes an entire segment of his solo show to the Biblical story of Onan. Fugelsang has the soul of an iconoclast, but he's dabbling in a genre that doesn't play to his strengths. The director, Pam MacKinnon, works against his inclination to rant and rave by saddling him with too much blocking, and when the show finally does pick up, with a knock-'em-dead story about smuggling medicinal marijuana through airport security, we get only a glimmer of what Fugelsang could do with better material and a little room to breathe. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

BIOGRAPHY
The Pearl presents S. N. Behrman's 1932 comedy, about a Manhattan artist who causes a rumpus with the announcement of her revealing autobiography. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

BLACKBIRD
The winner of the Olivier for Best New Play in Britain this year, David Harrower's work is a confrontation drama: someone shows up to confront someone else about an injustice that he committed in the past, and gradually we come to understand that the injured party was complicit in his own abuse. Because Harrower has filched the play's story from the headlines—What is childhood sexuality? Can children be seductive? And do adults scar them forever if they fall for that seduction?—sitting in the audience is less like going to a play than like participating in a new form of journalism: the ticker-tape drama. You can't blame the actors—Jeff Daniels and Alison Pill—or the director, Joe Mantello, but you can certainly be annoyed with Harrower for the cheap shot he takes at our expense. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/23/07.) (City Center, Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE COLOR OF FLESH
Joel Gross's drama about Marie Antoinette, her portrait painter, and Count Alexis de Ligne. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 212-868-4444. Through April 29.)

FROST/NIXON
Frank Langella and Michael Sheen star in the Donmar Warehouse production of Peter Morgan's drama. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

IN DARFUR
The Public presents a developmental production of a play by Winter Miller, directed by Joanna Settle, that examines the crisis in Darfur. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through April 29.)

INHERIT THE WIND
As persistent in its relevance as it is old-fashioned in structure, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's 1955 fictionalization of the Scopes trial can still get an audience fired up about free thought. Doug Hughes's revival stars Brian Dennehy, as the grand and desperate Matthew Harrison Brady, and Christopher Plummer, as his opponent, the progressive curmudgeon Henry Drummond. Forget the forced ominousness of Hughes's staging: Plummer's per-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BABY LOVE

The British pop singer Natasha Bedingfield has released a new single called "I Wanna Have Your Babies," which is playing regularly in Britain on Radio 1 these days and will soon be coming to these shores. The beat sunnily combines big drums and twinkly keyboard—it's something De la Soul would have used in the eighties. Bedingfield begins the verse in her lower range, sounding loose and confident and suggesting something delightfully immodest: "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, but what if it don't? / What happens in my head stays in my head, but sometimes it won't." Bedingfield's secret is taboo; she's "gotta beep out what I really want to shout." (She achieves this self-censorship by closing her mouth and humming.) As it turns out, her forbidden desire is so innocent it's perverse—she wants to have a baby, and she's even "picked out the church, all the schools, all the names." Bedingfield is not singing about the recreational aspects of procreation, but the emotional need to have a child. In an age of unlimited lasciviousness, this song is possibly the freakiest thing on pop radio right now.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

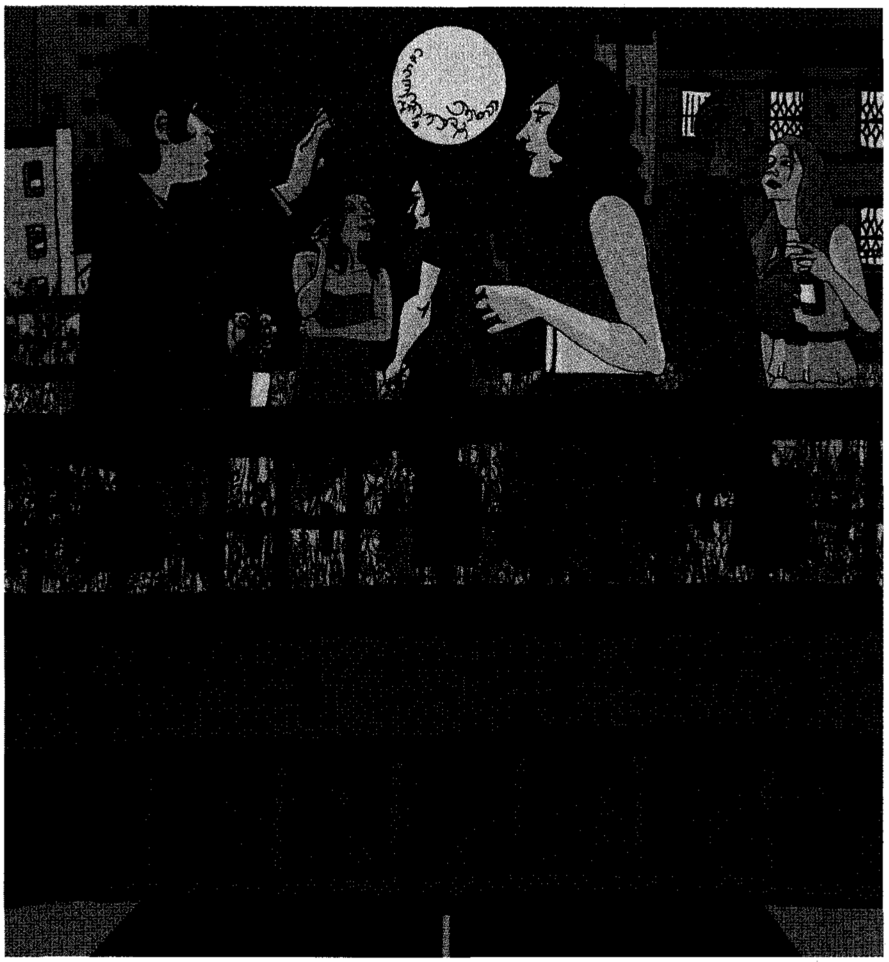
ROBERT PIERSANTI

formance is so cunning, and so disarming, that he manages to subvert the entire enterprise with a snap of his suspenders. In a society that continues to pit faith against science, Drummond's defense of skepticism is certainly apt—but Plummer's delivery is something to be savored. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

JANE EYRE
The Acting Company presents a stage adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 masterpiece. (Rose Nagelberg, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-279-4200.)

THE J.A.P. SHOW, JEWISH AMERICAN PRINCESSES OF COMEDY
Cory Kahaney, Jackie Hoffman, Cathy Ladman, and Jessica Kirson pay homage to their comedic forebears. (Actors Temple Theatre, 339 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

MACBETH
Chicago Shakespeare Theatre and Milan's Colla Marionette Company present a children's version of the tragedy. (New Victory, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through April 29.)



The Highline Ballroom, a new venue, opens this week on West Sixteenth Street.

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN
Eugene O'Neill's relatively actionless drama is set in an unnamed Connecticut town, in September, 1923. The motherless, Irish-American Josie Hogan (Eve Best) is meant to be strong enough to take over the farm run by her penny-pinching, emotionally withholding father, Phil (Colm Meaney), if she chooses to. Best is a fine actress—a tough and vulnerable Olive Oyl, with a wily, sad face—but she is poorly cast as Josie. The alcoholic, witty, and broken-down Jim (Kevin Spacey) is always just drunk or sick enough not to register the ways in which Josie and Phil allow him to reëxperience his former family life. Spacey has found a challenge in O'Neill, whose main object as a writer was to show that lies can not only cripple the psyche but also completely undo the transformative effect of love. Like Josie with Jim, Best struggles to keep Spacey engaged on a deeper level, experiencing the play as though it were happening not only to him but to the other characters as well. (4/23/07) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

TRANSFIGURES
"Are religious people brain-damaged, or am I mapping the existence of God?" asks a clinical researcher studying a young man who experienced Jerusalem syndrome, a psychotic episode in which a visitor to Israel will, typically, lose touch with reality (and clothing) and do a walkabout as a Biblical figure. Lear deBessonet conceived and directed this fascinating piece, pulling text from such diverse sources as Ibsen, the trial of Joan of Arc, and jailhouse interviews with John Salvi, the abortion-clinic murderer. The sound designer Mark Huang wraps the play's eighty intermissionless minutes in a percussive, electronic musical tapestry, and the six fine actors also perform beautiful choreography by Andrea Haenggi. The play is funny, chilling, enlightening, and mysterious—in short, everything an evening at the theatre should be. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

THE COAST OF UTOPIA: Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DEFENDER OF THE FAITH:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through April 29. **EXITS AND ENTRANCES:** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through April 29. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **HOWARD KATZ:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **JACK GOES BOATING:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through April 29. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TALK RADIO:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—April 26: The Virginia rappers **Clipse**, longtime friends of the production duo the Neptunes. April 28: **Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers**, an All-American rock juggernaut out of Arizona. April 30: The R. & B. singer **Vivian Green.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—April 25: The former Throwing Muses front woman **Kristin Hersh** stops by with a full band, complete with a string section, and songs from her new album, "Learn to Sing Like a Star." April 26-27: **Brandi Carlile,** an up-and-coming (some would say already arrived) vocalist with a glorious set of pipes, mixes a folk sensibility with a country sentimentality and a hard-rocking approach.

BROOKLYN LYCEUM
227 Fourth Ave., at President St., Park Slope (718-857-4816)—April 27: The theremin magician **Pamelia Kurstin,** who has earned renown for creating a powerful orchestral effect with her instrument by layering waves of beautiful—and sometimes dissonant—improvised melodies, celebrates the release of her new album, "Thinking Out Loud." Kurstin also plays a key role in the Brooklyn-based cabaret rock band **Barbez,** which joins the gritty instrumental trio **Big Lazy** in opening for her here.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—April 24-25: The Canadian rockers the **Tragically Hip,** an arena-size act at home, squeeze their ambitions into this stepping stone of a venue. April 29: **Cannibal Corpse** is a death-metal band whose finesse-free output (it's a stretch to call it music) is as unsavory in its sound as it is in its lyrical content. Its most recent album, "Kill," boasts such fare as "Make Them Suffer," "Five Nails Through the Neck," and "Barbaric Bludgeonings."

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—April 30: **Lou Reed,** the self-styled crankiest man in rock, opens this new West Side venue. The club, which is operated by the same folks who are behind the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill and is situated above a supermarket, has a capacity of seven hundred fans standing, and about half that for a seated audience. The room takes its name from the neighborhood's defunct elevated freight railway. A small portion of the revenue from each ticket will support efforts to turn it into a park, and the acts promise to be as diverse as the population that may eventually be found there on a sunny day. The lapidary singer-songwriter **Jonatha Brooke** performs the following night, and the performance artist Laurie Anderson, the jam band moe., and the rapper Mos Def are all slated for later in the month.

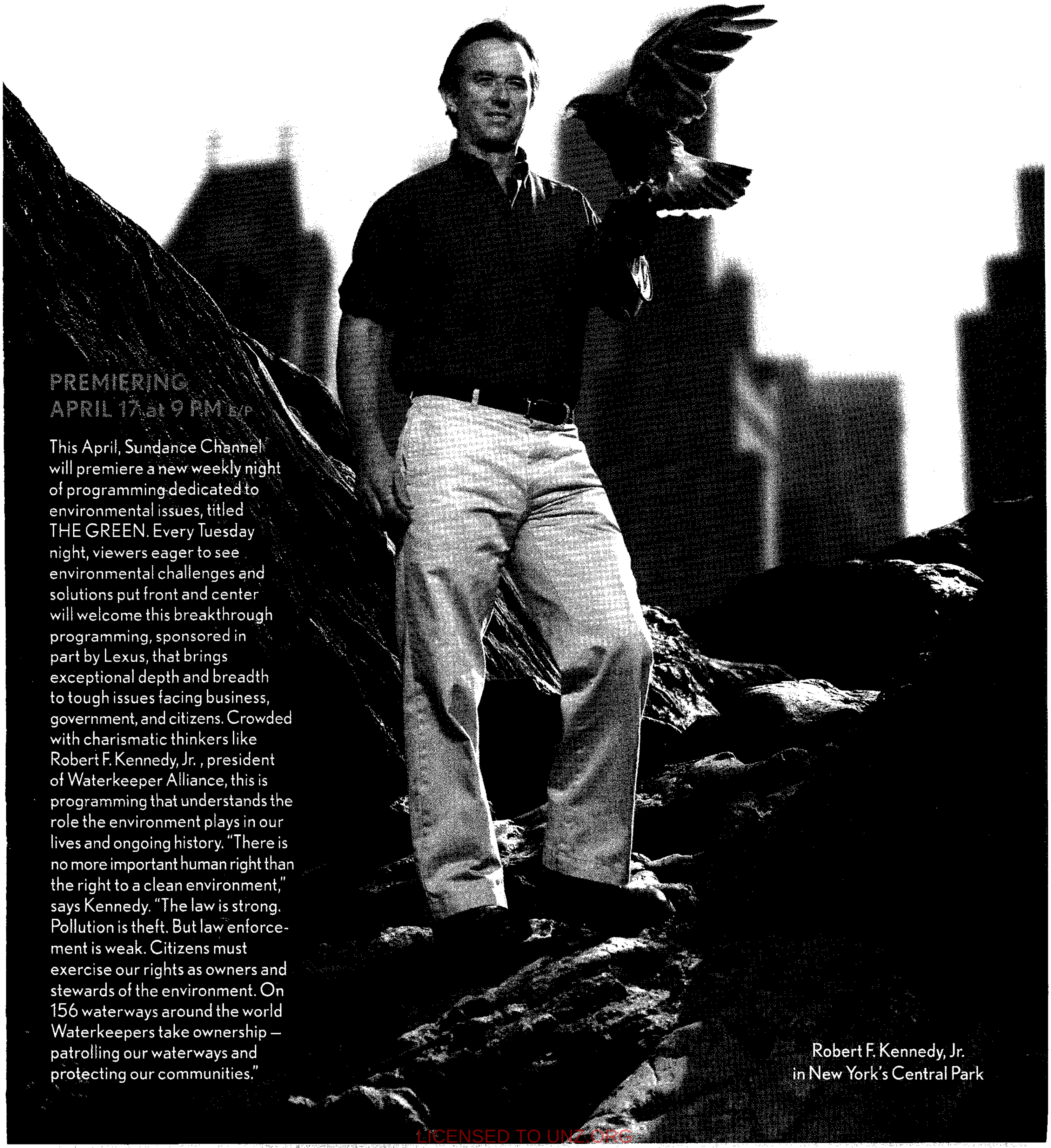
JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—April 24 and April 29: The singer **Anjani,** a protégée of Leonard Cohen. April 24-25: The Brooklyn native and popular-music icon **Neil Sedaka** celebrates fifty years in the business. April 26: The **Golden Arm Trio** is a shifting Austin-based ensemble (here the instrumentation will be upright bass, piano, cello, saxophone, and drums), led by the composer Graham Reynolds, that specializes in upbeat, noirish instrumentals. Reynolds's taut compositions sometimes evoke John Barry's classic sixties Bond themes. In performance, they often begin with him playing the tune's intro and theme on piano before getting up and walking, mid-song, to the drums as the band plays on. Though he is equally at home in a dive or a concert hall (he recently composed the soundtrack to Richard Linklater's 2006 film "A Scanner Darkly," and the group has performed it live in a variety of venues), Reyn-

JASHAR AWAN

LEXUS invites you to Robert Redford's

THE GREEN

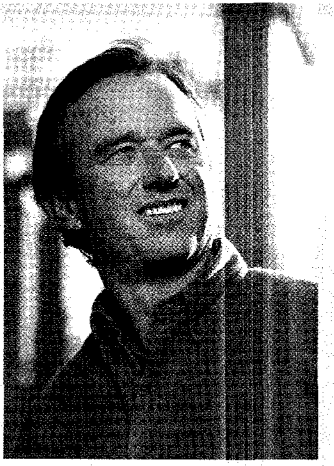
A new weekly primetime destination on Sundance Channel dedicated to green living



PREMIERING APRIL 17 at 9 PM E/P

This April, Sundance Channel will premiere a new weekly night of programming dedicated to environmental issues, titled THE GREEN. Every Tuesday night, viewers eager to see environmental challenges and solutions put front and center will welcome this breakthrough programming, sponsored in part by Lexus, that brings exceptional depth and breadth to tough issues facing business, government, and citizens. Crowded with charismatic thinkers like Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., president of Waterkeeper Alliance, this is programming that understands the role the environment plays in our lives and ongoing history. "There is no more important human right than the right to a clean environment," says Kennedy. "The law is strong. Pollution is theft. But law enforcement is weak. Citizens must exercise our rights as owners and stewards of the environment. On 156 waterways around the world Waterkeepers take ownership – patrolling our waterways and protecting our communities."

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
in New York's Central Park



THE ECOISTS

This short-form series harnesses the energy of celebrity by showcasing 13 big personalities and their signature causes. You'll see our world through the eyes of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Ed Begley, Woody Harrelson, Daryl Hannah, Laird Hamilton, Gabby Reece, Josh Lucas, Laura Dern, Amber Valletta, Tim Robbins, Moby, Morgan Freeman, and Ted Danson.

One ECOISTS highlight is a look at the changing tides with Robert. F. Kennedy, Jr., whose Waterkeeper Alliance connects, supports, and champions local clean water advocates: Waterkeepers act as investigator, lawyer, educator, and scientist – the voice of their waterway. Waterkeeper Alliance is a grassroots organization dedicated to protecting the planet's water, and our communities, from polluters.

big ideas for a small planet

A 13-episode Sundance Channel original series takes viewers on explorations near and far to find people, products, and processes that are on the leading edge of a green world and that have the potential to change our everyday lives. These features on imaginative fashion and product design, first-time inventors and entrepreneurs are likely to inspire "I can do that, too" thinking in viewers. A recurring cast of colorful, expert commentators including activists, scientists, and writers will provide context.

Five segments are highlighted here:

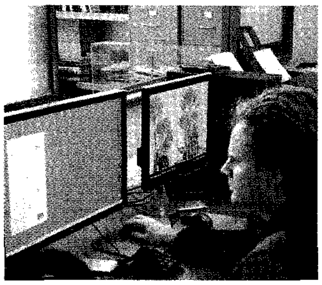
FUEL

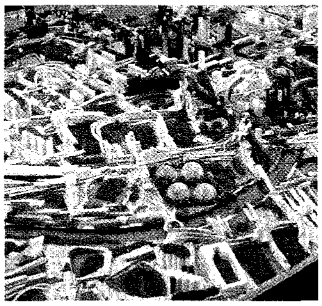
Tuesday, April 17, 9 PM E/P

An alternative-fuel enthusiast and inventor of Veg Powered Systems, Joel Woolf drag-races a truck powered by the vegetable oil from a fried-chicken tailgate party; Colette Brooks, a fanatic for muscle cars and designer shoes, leads a bio-diesel PR campaign that pairs clients with diesel-powered cars around the country; and Indy Racing League's Jeff Simmons prepares for the 2007 season by suiting up to test-drive a car that runs on 100% ethanol.

BUILD

Tuesday, April 24, 9 PM E/P



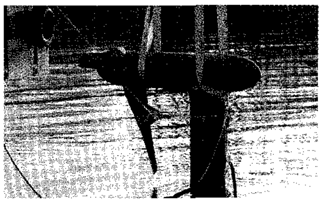


Visionary architect Michelle Kaufmann builds an ultra-sustainable modular prefab "Glidehouse" for a couple looking to enjoy life off the grid; architect Carlton Brown defies the odds to build a low-income sustainable housing project in Harlem; and MIT genius Mitchell Joachim creates a spectacular futuristic living space with his "Fab Tree Hab" living house, made from intertwined trees.

CITIES

Tuesday, May 1, 9 PM E/P

Portland real-estate developer Dennis Wilde is the pioneering force behind the South Waterfront project, which is turning a polluted brown field into a flourishing sustainable community; Heather Flores and her band of guerrilla gardeners work overnight to beautify blighted urban plots of unused land with local plants and flowers; and Trey Taylor, co-founder of Verdant Power, hopes to light up the Manhattan skyline using renewable energy when he submerges the first two underwater turbines in the East River.



the GREEN™ "Tune in. Take action. Let's commit to that."

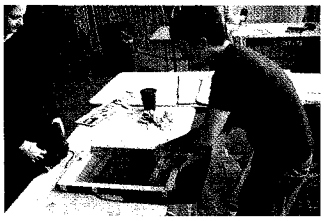
sundance
CHANNEL

FUEL Tuesday, April 17, 9 PM E/P	**CITIES** Tuesday, May 1, 9 PM E/P	**EAT** Tuesday, May 15, 9 PM E/P	**FURNISH** Tuesday, May 29, 9 PM E/P
BUILD Tuesday, April 24, 9 PM E/P	**WEAR** Tuesday, May 8, 9 PM E/P	**DRIVE** Tuesday, May 22, 9 PM E/P	**CREATE** Tuesday, June 5, 9 PM E/P

WEAR

Tuesday, May 8, 9 PM E/P

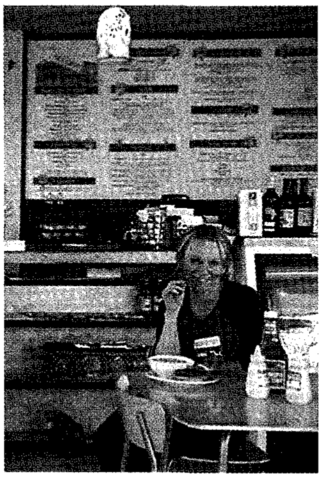
Eco-couture designer Linda Loudermilk creates an outfit for Robert Downey Jr. and prepares for a New York fashion show featuring her eco-friendly luxury designs; as head of Patagonia's environmental products division, Jill Dumain spearheads the company's cutting-edge sportswear line, which recycles soda bottles and worn-out garments to produce high-quality active wear; and Lori Petitti, hosting her first Swap-O-Rama-Rama, invites people to channel their creative energies into constructing new fashion statements from used garments that would otherwise have been discarded.



EAT

Tuesday, May 15, 9 PM E/P

"It" chef Kris Morningstar takes us on a tour of his new green restaurant, Blue Velvet, where the food is grown locally, the decor is created from sustainable products, and the rooftop doubles as a high-concept produce garden; Local Burger owner Hilary Brown buys sustainable meat and produce from farms within 100 miles of her restaurant and challenges a fast-food addict to eat off the Local Burger menu for a month; Tom Szaky, young entrepreneur and CEO of TerraCycle, finds treasure in the dirt with his 100% green fertilizer line made from surprising stuff.



– Robert Redford

ECO IDEAS

FROM LEXUS

Lexus believes that one needn't choose between luxury and social conscience, and is committed to constantly evolving sustainable practices. Witness: Lexus Luxury Hybrids.

The following are just a few other practices that are both rewarding and sustainable, that fulfill the desire for quality, comfort, and style without compromising the needs of the earth.

- Explore wines from organic or bio-dynamic wineries that practice innovative farming techniques that not only are eco-friendly and sustainable but produce superior results.
- Shop clothing brands that cleave to the highest standards in design and craftsmanship while extracting the bare minimum from the earth's precious capital. Couture designs made of organic cotton, bamboo, wool, or silk are the new luxe look.
- The next time you need a chauffeur service or taxi, consider a luxury car service that relies on a fleet of hybrids. Choose a roomy RXh or a racy GSh.
- When you redesign or redecorate your home, look at raw materials such as bamboo, rattan, abaca, and recycled glass. These materials are being exploited to sophisticated and award-winning results.
- Set your travel sights on Eco-Luxury. The Pacific coast of Costa Rica's rural Guanacaste province features a host of eco-luxury resorts, mixing sophisticated accommodations and luxurious amenities with environmentally rich surroundings.
- Take a page from what many Europeans have known all along: that organic and locally-grown foods make any dish dishier.

Explore the growing world of eco-conscious luxury at **lexus.com/hybridliving.**

KIDS
Tuesday, June 12, 9 PM E/P

PAPER or PLASTIC
Tuesday, June 19, 9 PM E/P

SPORTS
Tuesday, June 26, 9 PM E/P

WORK
Tuesday, July 3, 9 PM E/P

PRAY
Tuesday, July 10, 9 PM E/P

For more information, visit sundancechannel.com

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GIVES MORE TO THE DRIVER. TAKES LESS FROM THE WORLD.

*Ratings achieved using the required premium unleaded gasoline with an octane rating of 91 or higher. ©2007 Lexus.

olds seems to be happiest when playing the ecstatic snare-heavy drum breakdowns that pepper Golden Arm's set. Sharing the evening is the one-man band **Sxip Shirey**, who plays Gypsy melodies on a slew of traditional and homemade instruments in a mesmerizing fashion.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—April 27: The edgy singer-songwriter **Graham Parker**, one of the original angry young men of the New Wave, has had a lower profile than his fellow-Brits Elvis Costello and Joe Jackson, but his straightforward, acerbic songs of heartbreak and botched romance rank right up there. His latest release is "Don't Tell Columbus."

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—April 28: Three years ago, the **Killers** arrived from Las Vegas toting an album, "Hot Fuss," that was bursting with sounds from an era the band members were largely too young to have experienced (specifically, the New Wave). For their sophomore effort, "Sam's Town," which came out last year, the band adopted a different but no less backward-looking approach. They ditched the shiny pop of Duran Duran and the Cars for the earnest engagement of Bruce Springsteen and U2. Most young bands wouldn't be able to survive such a stylistic about-face with their reputation intact, but the Killers seem to be pulling it off.

NEW YORK UKE FEST
More than fifty acts from around the world show off the adaptability of the ukulele. It's good for jazz improvisation, country strumming, punk smashing (a conjecture), and, of course, Hawaiian folk songs. Instructional workshops are planned for those wishing to improve their own playing, and venders will be on hand for anyone who catches the ukulele bug. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 212-352-3101. April 26-29.)

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—April 25: **Faithless** started off as a British house-music act in the mid-nineties, specializing in atmospheric dance tracks with a hypnotic pulse. Over the past decade or so, they have injected their propulsive music with a pop accessibility, lyrical distinction, and a social conscience that set the band apart from other faceless, assembly-line electronic acts. Faithless's music can be as compelling off the dance floor as it is on. April 29: **Yo La Tengo**, the noted Hoboken trio with a flair for crisp, three-minute pop songs as well as sprawling feedback experiments. May 1-2: **Peter Bjorn and John** are indie rockers with a soft spot for the winsome pop of the sixties. The three friends from Stockholm punctuate their sunny vision with handclaps, whistling, and other sweet effects.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—April 24-28: The singer and guitarist **John Pizzarelli** may not have the vocal style of Frank Sinatra, but he shares a sense of unerring swing and well-honed good taste. He pays tribute to Ol' Blue Eyes, backed by a big band.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—If your image of the conga drum as a musical instrument begins and ends with visions of Desi Arnaz beating out "Babalu," the lineup here this week will open your eyes. Three master *congueros* with three different rhythmic and tonal identities—**Francisco Aguabella** (April 24), **Candido** (celebrating his eighty-sixth birthday here on April 25), and **Poncho Sanchez** (April 26-29)—lead steaming Latin-jazz ensembles.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through April 28: **Keely Smith.** The wild man Louis Prima's onetime sidekick ensconced in the tony Café Carlyle? Not to worry: Smith, the eye within the Prima gang's storm, mixes her swinging mirth with expressive ballads that point to where her artistic heart lies.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—**Donny Osmond**, the teen-pop idol turned Broadway performer (he was recently on the Great White Way as Gaston in "Beauty and the Beast"), has a new album, "Love Songs of the 70s." He delivers the material live here April 24-28.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—April 26-28: For die-hard jazz fans, such tunes as Horace Silver's "Song for My Father," Kenny Dorham's "Blue Bossa," and Hank Mobley's "This I Dig of You" are as indelible as the work of Porter or Berlin. **Wynton Marsalis** and the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra** dip into these and other songs in the Blue Note Record catalogue, reworking the classic tunes with fresh big-band scores.

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—April 26-28: Firehouse 12 Records, a jazz label that looks beyond the mainstream, presents three ambitious bands on successive nights: The **Tyshawn Sorey** quartet, the **Taylor Ho Bynum** sextet, and the **Luis Perdomo** trio, respectively.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—April 26-29: **Steve Wilson's Generations** band brings together **Mulgrew Miller** on piano, **Ray Drummond** on bass, and **Ben Riley** on drums. That's a crack rhythm section capable of making any saxophonist sound good, let alone one of Wilson's uncommon talents.

MERKIN CONCERT HALL
129 W. 67th St. (212-501-3330)—April 26: A double bill of Latin-styled chamber jazz with the mellifluous clarinettist **Paquito D'Rivera** and his trio and **Edmar Castaneda** and his trio, which unites the agile harpist with a trombonist and a drummer.

ROSE THEATRE
Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—April 25: The conductor **Gunther Schuller** leads more than thirty players through a historic performance of the late Charles Mingus's mammoth composition "Epitaph," which was last performed in the city in 1989. The show, which is in honor of Mingus's eighty-fifth birthday, features recently discovered additions to "Epitaph."

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5500, ext. 344)—April 27: Over the past decade, **Roswell Rudd**, one of the first trombonists to embrace free jazz, has been mating his horn work with musicians from Africa and Asia. This museum's gloriously unamplified performance space will be the perfect spot for his multicultural explorations.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—April 24-29: The **Al Foster** quartet. Foster, an esteemed drummer, has brought rhythmic sparkle to the bands of Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and Joe Henderson, among many others. Here he's joined by the Israeli saxophonist **Eli Degibri**, the pianist **Kevin Hays**, and the bassist **Doug Weiss.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

DVD NOTES
THE ARTIST'S ARTIST

Throughout his long career, the director Jean Renoir (1894-1979), the second son of the painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, displayed a fascination with all sorts of artistic creation. Most of his films feature painting, music, dance, or writing; his masterwork, "The Rules of the Game" (1939), about the collapse of Old World values on the eve of the Second World War, turns on an amateur theatrical soirée. The remarkable new **Jean Renoir Collector's Edition Box Set** (Lionsgate), offering seven rarely seen works, shows how he reworked his artistic heritage with increasing depth from the silent era through the age of television.

Renoir considered his 1926 adaptation of Émile Zola's "Nana"—presented here in a splendid tinted restoration—his first fully realized film. In the title role, Catherine Hessling (Renoir's wife at the time) gives a gleefully over-the-top performance as the flamboyantly vulgar showgirl who becomes a cruelly capricious courtesan and drives two despairing lovers to suicide. Renoir turns the melodrama by Zola (a friend of his father) into a meticulous reconstruction of the Second Empire as well as a tribute to the world his father painted: the outdoor ball where Nana does a rousing cancan is Impressionism in motion.

In 1938, Renoir made "La Marseillaise," about the French Revolution, with funding from a left-wing labor union. This poetic, anecdotal history, which runs from the fall of the Bastille through the storming of the Tuileries, in 1792, is revolution without the guillotine—and is also, as the title suggests, the backstory to a song, the French national anthem. Following a group of populist rebels from Marseilles from their conquest of a local garrison through their march to Paris (they sing and discuss the song en route), Renoir presents, in effect, a band of troubadours with flintlocks. In a reflection of the battles brewing in Renoir's own time, the hearty troupe is mobilizing to fight against invading Prussian forces allied with ancien-régime traitors.

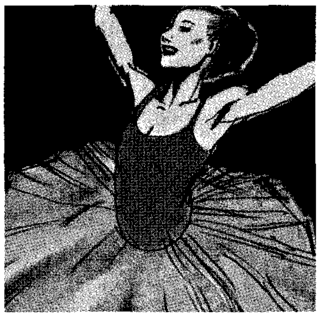
"The Testament of Dr. Cordelier," from 1959, Renoir's radical revision of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," was made for French television, and begins with Renoir himself arriving at the studio and going on the air to introduce the story. Shooting television-style, with up to eight cameras per scene, Renoir emphasizes the film's theatrical aspects, especially the actor Jean-Louis Barrault's virtuoso transformations from the psychiatrist Cordelier to his demonic other, Mr. Opale, and back. The drama is set in contemporary Paris and its plush suburbs, where the high walls and hidden courtyards play a central role: in Renoir's philosophical view, these barriers and recesses embody the hidden desires and bourgeois repression that drive Dr. Cordelier to conduct his ill-advised experiments.

—*Richard Brody*

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—The Met's new permanent Greek and Roman galleries opened on April 20. ♦ **"Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797."** Through July 8. ♦ **"Barcelona and Moder-**

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CHILD OF MORNING



You have two months to see Kyra Nichols, New York City Ballet's senior ballerina, before she retires. In her youth, Nichols's leading traits were strength, precision, and a ravishing variety of musical phrasing. You could hardly ask for anything more from a dancer. Actually, you could ask for one thing more: some access to tragic feeling. Nichols seemed to be a child of morning, all clarity and joy. But, as Balanchine once said, she was a "slow-baked potato." She wasn't done yet. In her late twenties, after a decade on the stage, she unleashed a sort of depth charge. I saw it first in 1984, when she went into Balanchine's "Liebeslieder Walzer" and did the famous "I see me dead" duet, where the woman lies in her partner's arms horizontally, like a two-by-four, or a corpse. Nichols made this utterly piercing, the more so since, in her, the dark note was so unforced, and so unexpected. At that point she became a complete artist. N.Y.C.B.'s spring season opens on Tuesday. To find out what nights Nichols is dancing, look at www.nycballet.com. Or go to her retirement performance on June 22. It will be a weeper.

—*Joan Acocella*

nity: Gaudí to Dalí." Through June 3. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Discovering Tutankhamun: The Photographs of Harry Burton."** Through April 29. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Closed Circuit: Video and New Media at the Metropolitan."** Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions."** Through May 21. ♦ **"Live/Work: Performance Into Drawing."** Through May 21. ♦ **"Jeff Wall,"** a mid-career survey of the Canadian photographer's work. Through May 14. ♦ **"Comic Abstraction: Image Making, Image Breaking."** Through June 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Hugo Boss Prize 2006: Tacita Dean."** Through June 6. ♦ **"The Shapes of Space"** will open in stages throughout the summer, as restoration work on the Guggenheim's flagship building progresses. Among the works will be installations by Pipilotti Rist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Piotr Ulanski. Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: Restoring a Masterpiece."** Through July 8. ♦ **"Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy."** Opens April 27. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Lorna Simpson."** Through May 6. ♦ **"Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar."** Through June 24. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"George Stubbs (1724-1806): A Celebration."** Through May 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—On entering the exhibition **"A New Light on Tiffany,"** one may at first wonder what a vintage bicycle and an endorsement by Susan B. Anthony ("Bicycling has done more to emancipate women than anything in the world"!) have to do with Louis Comfort Tiffany. It turns out that one of Tiffany's star designers was Clara Driscoll, a model of the turn-of-the-(last)-century New Woman, an independent proto-feminist with serious art training and a successful career in industrial design. (She was also a competent manager who headed the women's studio at Tiffany.) Along with artifacts from that era are glittering examples of Driscoll's finest creations, including the popular dragonfly and wisteria lamps—the latter composed of nearly two thousand pieces of colored glass—and lampshades decorated with complex motifs of hollyhocks, peonies, grapes, and nasturtiums. Through May 28. ♦ **"Audubon's Aviary: Natural Selection."** The museum's third exhibition of watercolors made in preparation for the mammoth "Birds of America" is accompanied by videos, artifacts, and recordings of the birds' songs. Through May 20. ♦ **"The World of Asher B. Durand: The Artist in Antebellum New York."** Through Sept. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—In **"Philosophy of Time Travel,"** a collaborative installation made by five artists (Edgar Arceneaux, Vincent Galen Johnson, Olga Koumoundouros, Rodney McMillian, and Matthew Sloly; all attended CalArts and have worked together in various capacities over the last decade), a huge replica of Constantin Brancusi's "Endless Column" smashes through the ceiling and into the museum's main gallery. Entrails of insulation, wiring, and drywall spill from the hole where the missile made its entry; splintered floorboards surround its crumpled nose. The project is rife with symbolism: Brancusi's war memorial has been turned into a weapon, an icon of twentieth-century modernism has collided with a building that's a forum both for emerging artists of color and for those neglected by the history books. It's a vigorous, humorous comment on the museum's relationship with the canon, and more. Through July 1. ♦ **"Henry Taylor: Sis and Bra."** Through July 1. ♦ **"Silhouette: Collection in Context."** Through July 1. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

UKRAINIAN MUSEUM

222 E. 6th St. (212-228-0110)—**"Crossroads: Modernism in Ukraine 1910-1930."** Through April 29. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11:30 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

THOMAS STRUTH

No matter how engaging and diverting, Struth's latest photographs of museumgoers don't exactly take this project into new territory. Here again, we're looking at people looking at art, much of which is outside Struth's frame and, apparently, not riveting enough to grab the crowd's full attention. At the Prado with "Las Meninas," clots of milling viewers look every which way while docents gesture in vain. At the Hermitage with unseen Leonardos, most of the audience appears glazed, puzzled, or unimpressed; two girls are far more absorbed by the image on a cell phone. Art provides an occasion to gather and gawk; Struth observes the tribal rituals with a sociologist's eye and a satirist's wit. Through April 28. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

Short List

LEE BONTECOU: Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through April 28. **WILLIAM KLEIN:** Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through June 2. **REBECCA SMITH:** Freilich, 22 E. 72nd St. 212-794-5220. Through April 28. **JAMES WELLING:** Horticultural Society of New York, 148 W. 37th St., 13th fl. 212-757-0915, ext. 113. Through June 29.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SAM DURANT

Durant is an archivist and a fan, a wisecracking consecrator of personal heroes, and a left-handed historical commentator. He has proposed monuments for Native Americans killed in confrontations with white settlers and has made work about the Rolling Stones, Robert Smithson, and the influential art critic Rosalind Krauss. His new project reviews the case for Joseph Beuys, whose particular brand of Conceptualist mysticism has of late fallen out of favor. The installation is deliberately musty, featuring notational drawings and a row of vitrines (containing, for example, toy monkeys and a sunflower; the vitrine was a recurrent trope of Beuys's). The tone is one of gentle mockery, but the Master gets to speak for himself on video monitors. Through April 28. (Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

JOAN JONAS

"The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things" reconfigures as an installation performances staged by Jonas and several collaborators at Dia Beacon in 2005 and 2006. It's a meditation on the life and work of the renegade art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929), who was obsessed with the indigenous cultures of the American Southwest. Many other subjects slip in, too—psychoanalysis, Las Vegas, butterflies. Videos used in the performance appear on hanging screens, while the stage is littered with artifacts and props—a stuffed coyote, paper hats, a toy police car, a giant metal hoop. The installation is alluring, but one can't help missing the pulse of real-time music and movement. Through April 26. (Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

MONA KUHN

Kuhn's big color photographs of attractive young men and women with their clothes off are easy to like but

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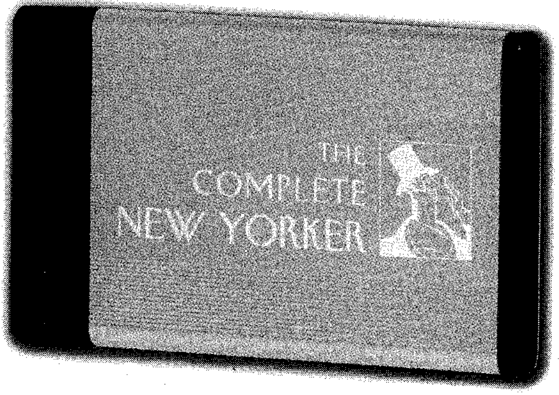

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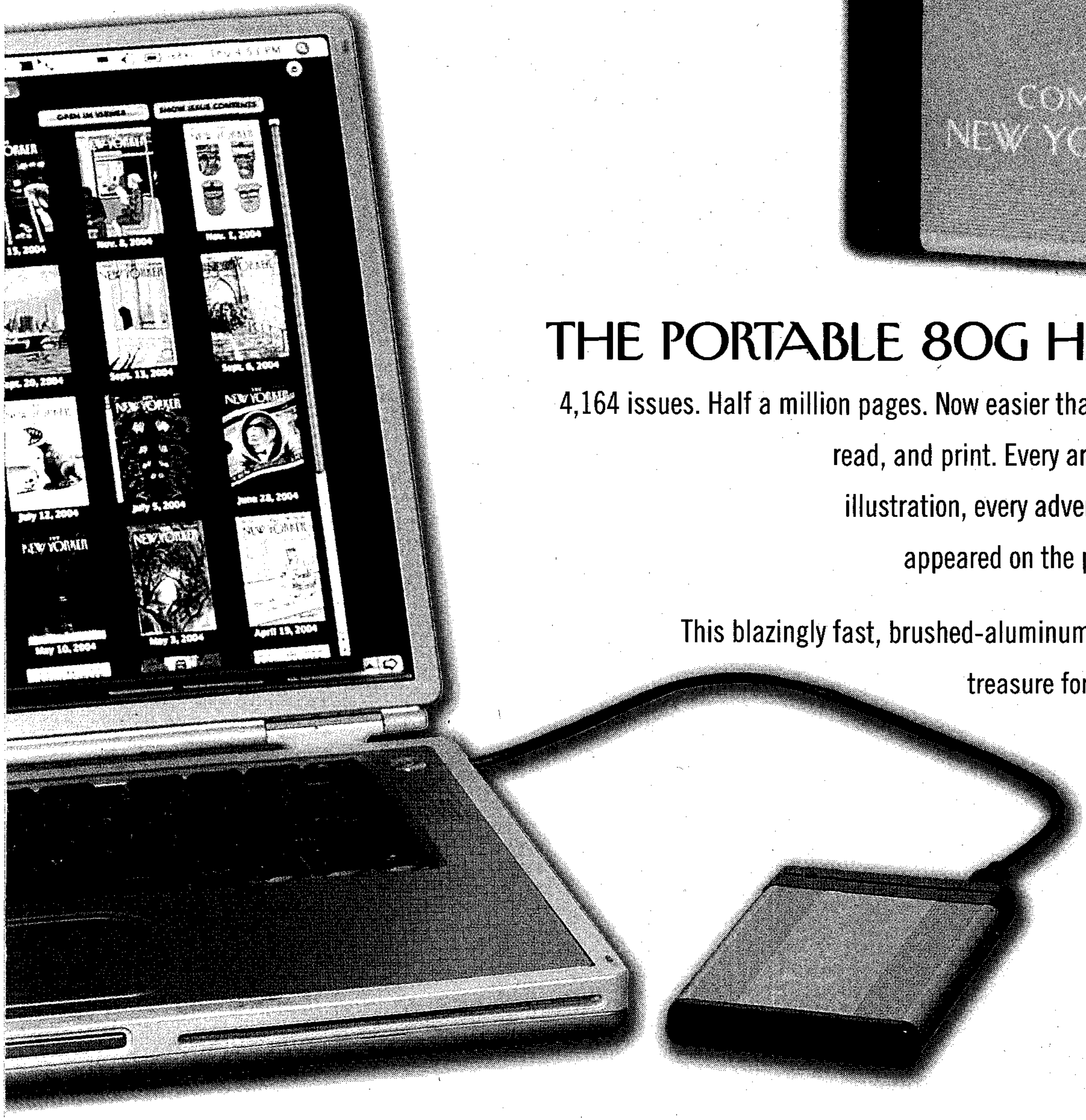

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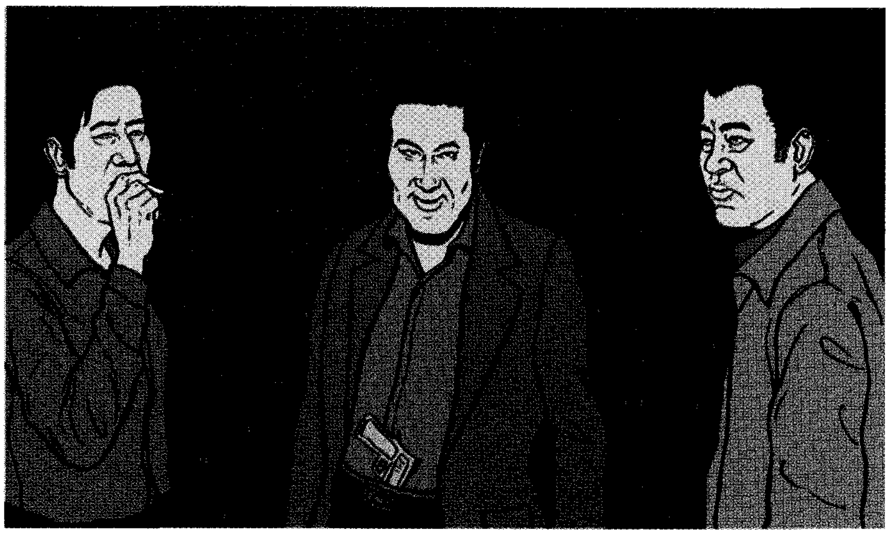
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hard to get excited about. That's partly because they're so damn tasteful (genitals are lost in shadow or relegated to out-of-focus passages); scattered about in self-consciously casual poses, these nudes are as decorative as statuary and just as disconnected from one another. But there's a larger problem: Kuhn is very good, but she reminds us of better photographers. Bill Jacobson and Uta Barth use a similarly seductive soft-focus technique without ever allowing their work to retreat into chic impressionism. Through April 28. (Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 212-741-8999.)

DAVID LACHAPELLE

For some time now, LaChapelle's signature has been gleefully vulgar excess; his super-glossy celebrity and fashion photographs define over-the-top. (His stylistic forebears: Pierre et Gilles and Liberace.) So it's pointless to criticize him for piling it on in "Deluge," this show's twenty-three-foot-long kitsch tour de force, a quasi-Biblical, mock-Géricault tableau of nudes fleeing a flooded Las Vegas. Natural disasters give the show a theme (storm-wrecked homes become backgrounds for fashion shoots) and the hook for a relatively restrained series of almost life-size figures floating underwater, which may be Bill Viola lite but still suggests heavenly transcendence. Through April 28. (Shafrazi, 544 W. 26th St. 212-274-9300.)



"Election," a Hong Kong gangster drama, directed by Johnnie To, opens April 25.

KAREN DAVISON

KEVIN LANDERS

A survey of the color photographs that Landers made between 1990 and 2007 showcases a slacker sensibility too amused and blasé to be seriously cynical. Like a grungier Martin Parr or Tony Feher with a camera, Landers makes pictures of people and products that tease Pop mercilessly. Studio still-lifes of panhandlers' cups, three-card-monte cardboard totems, and plastic bags snagged on broken branches rescue their subjects as found sculpture. Landers finds similarly funky ready-mades out in the world, including a sidewalk grate packed with cigarette butts, a tangle of hair wrapped around a sidewalk pole, and the greasy topology of a pizza pie. Call it photography of the absurd, but nobody does it better. Through May 12. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

JOSH SMITH

It's only April, but there are forty-two good-sized canvases in Smith's show, and they all bear the date 2007. Painstaking craftsmanship, in other words, is not Smith's deal—he makes big, splashy abstractions using what press materials mysteriously refer to as "a template-like motif," winking at the obvious contradiction of gestural expressions churned out factory-style. The problem is that the mythology of the grand abstract gesture standing as the mark of heroic individualism has long ago been tweaked and battered into irony; Smith is fighting a straw man, and that looks weak. Through April 28. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

HANNAH VAN BART

Cute yet menacing animal-human hybrids and sexy mutants drawn in a faux-folkloric mode occur a lot in painting these days. Collectively, they suggest illustrations of a proliferating dystopic fairy tale, perhaps obeying a generational imperative to merge neo-expressionist grotesques with memories of Saturday-morning cartoons. It all depends on how well one does the trick, and in the case of the young Dutch painter van Bart the answer is: quite well. A ham-handed bunny in a black cocktail dress, four-eyed ghosts with skin made of bricks, and misshapen pinup girls whose genitals burn through their clothes are sketched in strong, scrubbed lines, tinted dirty pink, stale mint, and sour beige. Through April 28. (Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889.)

"JUST KICK IT TILL IT BREAKS"

Conceived as an antidote to a moment "marked by tepid civic activism, widespread conservativism, and rampant consumerism," this exhibition attempts to—well, you get the idea from the title. The works are actually rather tame, from an agitprop standpoint, although they do a fine job of interrogating stances embodied by earlier art. Michael Phelan's tie-dyed target conflates Jasper Johns's conceptual formalism with hippie values that devolved into flaccid mainstream aesthetics. Meredyth Sparks's reworking of an image used by Gerhard Richter—a photograph of a Baader-Meinhof member in custody—simultaneously appropriates and critiques that artist's use of sexy, politicized images. And Carol Bove's elegant bookshelf sculpture demonstrates how art and ideas can become mere home décor for people who'd like to make a difference but never get around to doing so. Through April 28. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

"ROLE PLAY: FEMINIST ART REVISITED"

Whether because we need those years' raw insouciance and sense of purpose now or simply because of the synchronicity of fads, references to the sixties and seventies are popping up all over. This survey of performance-based photography and video dating from 1960 to 1980 includes classics like Shigeko Kubota's "Vaginal Painting" and Martha Rosler's "Semiotics of the Kitchen," alongside lesser-known works like Birgit Jürgenssen's eerie "Self with Fur," in which she wears a fox's face, and Valie Export's hilarious, mordant "Genital Panic," a riff on glamorizing images of Malcolm X and Huey P. Newton with guns. Also among the wild wimmin shown here are Anna Maria Maiolino, Adrian Piper, Hannah Wilke, and Francesca Woodman. Through April 28. (Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470.)

Short List

AMY CUTLER: Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450. Through April 28. **KIM DINGLE:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through April 28. **SAM DURANT:** Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through April 28. **TERESITA FERNÁNDEZ:** Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923. Through April 28. **SEAN LANDERS:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through June 16. **MARY LUCIER:** Lennon, Weinberg, 514 W. 25th St. 212-941-0012. Through April 28. **DANA SCHUTZ:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through May 19. **JAMES TURRELL:** PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through April 28. **JAMES WELLING:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through May 5.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

LAZHAR MANSOURI

Fifty-five gelatin-silver photographs of people living in a village in northern Algeria between 1950 and 1970. Through May 12. (Westwood, 568 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-925-5700.)

"MEET THE ARTISTS!"

You aren't so much meeting the artists here as trying to discern their respective contributions to this suite of paintings and prints, created in the span of a year and in the collaborative spirit of exquisite corpse, the Surrealist parlor game. The Fab Four in question are a quartet of provocateurs: the California performance artist and sculptor Paul McCarthy, the neo-Surrealist painter George Condo, and the British art duo Jake and Dinos Chapman. Condo lays the foundation with grotesque, cartoony heads. McCarthy weighs in with abject scribbles and found objects. The Chapman additions are less easy to identify, although authorship is their thing; in the past they raised hackles by altering Goya etchings, but here they've merely signed several of the works, treating them like solo endeavors. Through April 28. (Deitch, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

Tuesday marks the start of the spring season, which is dedicated to Lincoln Kirstein—the man who brought Balanchine to the United States, thereby irrevocably altering the course of American ballet—in his centenary year. The season opens with "For Lincoln: Ten Modern Classics," six rotating Balanchine programs. On May 1, the company holds its spring gala, at which it will unveil the new evening-length ballet from the company's director, Peter Martins, "Romeo + Juliet," set to Prokofiev's stirring score (there will also be a free dress rehearsal on April 29). The production brings together members of the two institutions Kirstein helped to create, the City Ballet and School of American Ballet; with the beloved Jock Soto as Lord Capulet and five young male students performing a "mandolin dance." ♦ April 24 at 7:30: "The Four Temperaments," "Pavane," "Agon," and "Symphony in C." ♦ April 25 at 7:30: "Concerto Barocco," "Duo Concertant," "Square Dance," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ April 26 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," "Duo Concertant," "The Four Temperaments," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ April 27 at 8: "Square Dance," "Pavane," "Episodes," and "Symphony in C." ♦ April 28 at 2: "Apollo," "Episodes," and "The Four Temperaments." ♦ April 28 at 8: "Apollo," "Agon," and "Symphony in C." ♦ April 29 at 7:30: Dress rehearsal of "Romeo + Juliet." ♦ May 1 at 7:30: "Romeo + Juliet" (première). (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 24.)

STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY

A New York season usually comes with the expectation of a première, but the new stuff on Petronio's Joyce program—excerpts from the unfinished "This Is a Story of a Girl in the World"—seems the least fresh. More striking is the rebirth of "ReBourne" (1997), a non-stop jumpfest to the Beastie Boys, and last year's uncharacteristically tender "Bud Suite," set to Rufus Wainwright recordings. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 24-25 at 7:30, April 26-28 at 8, and April 29 at 2 and 7:30.)

EIFMAN BALLET OF ST. PETERSBURG
In its final days at City Center, Boris Eifman's company presents his tortured "Russian Hamlet," in which the Danish Prince finds his parallel in the difficult life of Paul, the son of Catherine the Great, and his hot-blooded interpretation of Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. "Russian Hamlet": April 25-26 at 8. "Anna Karenina": April 27 at 8, April 28 at 2 and 8, and April 29 at 2 and 7.)

"LA MAMA MOVES!"
In its second year, the festival showcases fifty downtown companies at discount prices. Three weeks of thematically organized programs begin with "New Virtuosity," which includes a première choreographed and danced by the former Paul Taylor star Patrick Corbin, Dušan Týnek's recent "Fleur-de-Lis," and Robert Battle's popular rite, "The Hunt." (74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. April 26-29 at 7:30. Through May 13.)

FAYE DRISCOLL
Driscoll's quirky and amusing "Wow Mom, Wow" opens on a line of ten young women on all fours, shaking their butts. Between big ensemble numbers that look like drill-team routines for indie-pop bands or like the cast of "Cats" doing Michael Jackson's "Thriller," spoken and sung sections treat insecurities seriocomically and sometimes scatologically. (Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. April 26-28 at 8 and April 29 at 3.)

SOKOLOW THEATRE/DANCE ENSEMBLE
Jim May continues the noble and shaky project of tending Anna Sokolow's underappreciated legacy. Three powerful female solos from the thirties and forties that Sokolow reworked in the eighties set a high bar for new pieces by May and by the Argentinean choreographer Anabella Lenzu. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. April 26-28 at 8.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET
At Florence Gould Hall, the miniature ballet company performs three rarely seen chamber works: Antony Tudor's witty and decadent "Judgment of Paris" (set in a seedy café concert to Kurt Weill's suite from "The Threepenny Opera"), Agnes de Mille's ballet from "Carousel," and "Le Combat," a theatrical work set in the time of the Crusades, by William Dollar. (55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. April 27-28 at 7:30.)

ABT STUDIO COMPANY
The dancers of American Ballet Theatre's junior company, at N.Y.U.'s Skirball Center, perform the New York City première of "Ghost Light," by Brian Reeder, who once again puts his agile imagination to use in this whimsical tribute to the "ghosts" of the theatre. Antony Tudor's 1936 masterpiece of contained emotion "Jardin aux Lilas" will have its company première, and Kirk Peterson—the director of the ensemble—contributes a new solo, "Nocturne," for the amazingly elastic and classically pure seventeen-year-old Joseph Gorak. (566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. April 27 at 8 and April 28 at 2 and 8.)

"FROM TAP TO TOE"
During Symphony Space's dance sampler, the dishes keep coming: fifteen companies over four hours. There's some tasteful ballet courtesy of the Chamber Dance Project, a little hoofing in the Afro-Cuban mode of RumbaTap, and an extra helping of the circus side of New York dance. But the bulk of the program is contemporary-eclectic, including some of the downtown scene's best and brightest, such as Christopher Williams and Hilary Easton. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 28 at 7.)

YOUTH AMERICA GRAND PRIX GALA
The Y.A.G.P. competition awards scholarships to ballet schools around the world, and, for the winner of the Grand Prix, a contract with A.B.T.'s Studio Company. At the culminating gala performance this year, the Paris Opera étoiles Aurélie Dupont and Manuel Legris will appear, along with several dancers never before seen in New York, like the Brazilian ballet diva Cecilia Kerche and Alicia Amatriain, of Stuttgart. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. April 30 at 7.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Erika Sunnegårdh takes the demanding title role of Puccini's **"Turandot,"** with Liping Zhang and Richard Margison as Liù and Calaf, respectively; Marco Armiliato, who has emerged this season as more than just the Met's hardest-working Italian hand, conducts. (April 25 at 8 and April 28 at 8:30.) ♦ A new Figaro (Russell Braun) and a new Almaviva (Lawrence Brownlee) take their places in Bartlett Sher's savvy new production of **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia,"** joined by the stalwart Joyce Di Donato, John Del Carlo, and Samuel Ramey; the able Maurizio Benini remains in command. (April 26 and April 30 at 8.) ♦ The final performance of Handel's **"Giulio Cesare"** finds Danielle de Niese, a glamorous young singer who has just signed a contract with Decca, replacing the superb Cleopatra of Ruth Ann Swenson, and Lawrence Zazzo, an effective Tolomeo, taking over for David Daniels in the title role. Alice Coote and Patricia Bardon, an Anglo-Irish entente of glorious mezzo-soprano talent, remain in the roles of Sesto and Cornelia; Harry Bicket. (April 27 at 7:30.) ♦ If any Puccini opera belongs to the Met, it's **"Il Trittico,"** a brilliant sequence of one-act works that was commissioned by the company and premièred here (with such legends as Claudia Muzio, Geraldine Farrar, and Giuseppe De Luca in the leading roles) in 1918. The new production, directed by Jack O'Brien (one of Peter Gelb's first-season coups), features such singers as Maria Guleghina, Salvatore Licitra, Barbara Frittoli, Stephanie Blythe, and Alessandro Corbelli; James Levine. (April 28 at 1:30 and May 1 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

OPERA AT THE CONSERVATORIES
With City Opera's season at a close, New York's exceptional music schools fill the gap. Juilliard Opera Center offers three performances of Mozart's ambitious early opera **"La Finta Giardiniera,"** conducted by City Opera's Gary Thor Wedow, with Jay Lesenger directing. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 212-721-6500. April 25 and April 27 at 8 and April 29 at 2.) ♦ Cimarosa's seldom performed comedy **"L'Italiana in Londra"** will be offered at the Manhattan School of Music, conducted by another City Opera stalwart, Steven Mosteller. (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. 917-493-4428. April 25 and April 27 at 8 and April 29 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Anne-Sophie Mutter, an honored guest during the directorship of Kurt Masur, is naturally welcome at Lorin Maazel's Philharmonic. She performs one of the last classics of the German concerto repertoire—Berg's radiant Violin Concerto—in a program that also features works by Beethoven, Stravinsky ("Le Chant du Rossignol"), and Ravel (Suite No. 2 from "Daphnis et Chloé"). (April 25-26 at 7:30 and April 27-28 at 8. Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

ACADEMY OF ANCIENT MUSIC
Christopher Hogwood's groundbreaking band is now under the sure control of the harpsichordist Richard Egarr. Its Zankel Hall concert is a kind of duel between Handel and Telemann—including both composers' "Water Music" suites. (212-247-7800. April 26 at 7:30.)

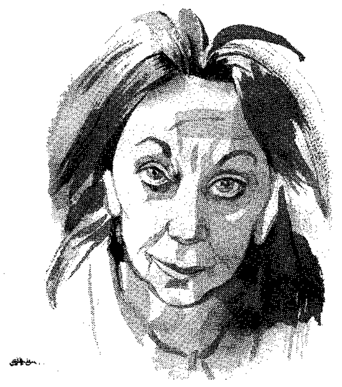
CHANTICLEER: "AND ON EARTH, PEACE"
The men of the lauded San Francisco chorus are just as passionate about new music as they are about technical perfection. In their next concert at the Metropolitan Museum, they offer the world première of a composite Mass commissioned from five very different composers—Doug Cuomo, Kamran Ince, Shulamit Ran, Ivan Moody, and Michael McGlynn. They'll make it work. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. April 26 at 8.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA: "JOHN ADAMS AT SIXTY"
The preëminent American composer of our time conducts the ensemble in three of his works: "My

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
LIVING PROOF

If the avant-garde theatre ever had a femme fatale, it was Judith Malina. Born in Kiel, Germany, eighty years ago, Malina moved to New York in 1928. Studying with Erwin Piscator at the New School, she fell under his Brecht-influenced sway but split off from both maestros when she opted for anarchism and nonviolence in her work. In 1947, Malina founded the Living Theatre with the late painter Julian Beck; they married in 1948. Involved in the "happening"—free-form theatrical events given definition by Malina's strict standards—Beck and his wife, who counted James Agee among her many lovers, changed the way American theatre looked. Malina still co-directs the Living Theatre even as she has continued acting: she was brilliant as the hysterical mother in "Dog Day Afternoon" and equally touching as Paulie's Aunt Dottie in "The Sopranos." For its sixtieth anniversary, the troupe is reviving "The Brig," which made Malina's name as a director who worked in the Scorsese mode—tough, brutal, distinctly New York—before there was a Scorsese.

—Hilton Als



PAUL HAMLYN

Father Knew Charles Ives," "The Wound Dresser" (with the bass Eric Owens, one of the stars of Adams's opera "Doctor Atomic"), and the rich and compelling Violin Concerto (with Leila Josefowicz). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 27 at 8.)

LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC
Esa-Pekka Salonen takes a victory lap at Lincoln Center, beginning a week of performances with an evening of works by Ravel (the Concerto for the Left Hand, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet), Prokofiev (a suite from "Romeo and Juliet"), and, of course, himself. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. April 29 at 3.)

AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Pieter Wispelwey, the immaculate Dutch cellist, solos with Richard Tognetti's impassioned group in a concert featuring Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins in B Minor, Haydn's Cello Concerto in C Major, and Tchaikovsky's "Souvenir de Florence." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. April 29 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
April 25 at 7:30: The Vermeer Quartet, a veteran ensemble long renowned for its lyric warmth and fastidious musicianship, says farewell to New York by performing three favorite string quartets: Schubert's youthful No. 10 in E-Flat; Britten's valedictory No. 3 ("Death in Venice"); and Dvořák's Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 51, a product of his early maturity. ♦ April 27 at 8 and April 29 at 5: Nicholas Maw, one of the society's "season composers," will enjoy the world première of his Sextet for Strings in a concert featuring the string-sextet prelude to Strauss's "Capriccio," the Adagio from Bruckner's String Quintet, and works by Haydn, Schumann, and Britten. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

MARIA BACHMANN
The vivacious violinist, deft at combining new works with old, performs pieces by Ravel, Copland, and Enescu (the stunning Violin Sonata No. 3) along with new music by John Corigliano and Paul Moravec. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. April 25 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE: JOHN ZORN
Columbia University is presenting the protean downtown composer (who won a MacArthur Award earlier this year) with the William Schuman Award, a prize given in honor of one of the school's most distinguished musical alumni. Zorn and some of his talented friends—including the clarinettist Michael Lowenstern and the cellist Fred Sherry—will perform a selection of his works (including "Cobra" and "Necronomicon"). (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. April 26 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
April 26-27 at 8. A group of young Turks known as the East Coast Chamber Orchestra fill the barge to the brim for an evening of music by Geminiani, Adams ("Shaker Loops"), Stravinsky, and Dvořák. ♦ April 28 at 8 and April 29 at 4: The Kremeratini Quartet offers two programs of music by Gubaidulina, Bach, Piazzolla, and Beethoven, in which they may be joined by a certain renowned violinist of Latvian descent. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MAURIZIO POLLINI
In the first of two recitals, the legendary pianist, who manages to be coldly reserved and deeply expressive at the same time, performs masterworks by Chopin (including the Two Nocturnes, Op. 27, and the Scherzo No. 3), Debussy, and Boulez (the Sonata No. 2). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 29 at 3.)

"FREE FOR ALL AT TOWN HALL": DAWN UPSHAW AND GILBERT KALISH
The price-is-right concert series, now in its fifth year, opens with a recital by the beloved American soprano and the distinguished pianist, who offer a program of songs (and solo piano pieces) by Ives, Crawford, Fauré, Ravel, Messiaen, Schumann, and Wolf, along with a couple of cabaret numbers by Weill and Bolcom. (123 W. 43rd St. April 29 at 5. Free tickets, which are limited to two per customer, will be available at the Town Hall box office beginning at noon.)

WORDLESS MUSIC SERIES
The distinctions between classical, rock, and experimental music mean little to the creators of this new series, who, for the next concert, bring together the cello-electric-guitar duo the Books with the cello-piano-percussion trio Real Quiet for an evening exploring works by Annie Gosfield, Marc Mellits ("Tight Sweater"), Phil Kline, and the musicians themselves. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. April 30 at 7:30. Tickets at the door.)

SERGEY KHACHATRYAN
An appealing new Armenian violinist, having successfully soloed with the Philharmonic, makes his New York recital début at Zankel Hall with Bach's Chaconne in D Minor and the Sonatas for Violin and Piano by Franck and Shostakovich. (212-247-7800. April 30 at 7:30.)

TABLES FOR TWO
SPIGA

200 W. 84th St. (212-362-5506)—This Italian restaurant opened a little over a year ago, in a space that had been occupied for the previous three decades by a tandoori place. In this area, one of the culinary dead zones people love to complain about, one merely hopes for a decent neighborhood option; but, for better or worse, Spiga doesn't aspire to be a standby. You can't get a basic risotto; this is cocoa-flavored-gnocchi-with-wild-boar territory. "There's plenty of osso bucco and risotto milanese in Manhattan," explains the waiter, a towering man with a buzz cut and hefty sideburns. "Our chef"—Salvatore Corea—"he is from the Calabria region. He has ideas."

Too many ideas, in some cases. The main one involves inverting sweet and savory flavors. An uneven starter of porcini prepared three ways, including fried mushroom (savory but boring), mushroom soup (way too salty), and mushroom ice cream (slightly sweet, very tasty), is typical. As for the cocoa gnocchi, the first bite is surprisingly good—fragrant and earthy, chocolate and boar melded seamlessly—but it's ultimately too heavy, and the cleverness wears off after a few bites. Still, when the sweet/savory concept works, as in a crisp fennel-and-orange salad with a kick of licorice, it can be pleasant. And the slices of roast duck, complemented by a mild, frothy turnip purée, stewed apples, apricot slivers, and a dollop of chocolate sauce, are sublime.

The service tends toward the eccentric, with shades of Fawlty Towers. "The chef is crazy," explains the waiter, his tone betraying admiration. "I am Italian," he confides later, as if it were a crucial piece of some puzzle. The waitstaff never seem to have the faintest idea as to who ordered which dish; instead, they adopt a tactic of auctioning off the plates. From time to time, the music (Sade's "Smooth Operator," maybe, or Paul Robeson's rendition of "Go Down Moses") is punctuated by the sound of a wineglass shattering in the background. And yet there is something cheerfully philosophical about the proceedings. "If it were my last meal, I'd have the tartare, then the gnocchi, followed by the pork loin," the waiter volunteers. "Then again, food is subjective." (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $23.95-$27.95.)

—Kate Julian

MOVIES OPENING

THE COLLECTOR
A documentary about the art dealer Allan Stone, directed by his daughter Olympia Stone. Opening April 25. (Pioneer Theatre.)

THE CONDEMNED
A thriller about a mortal game played by death-row inmates. Directed by Scott Wiper. Opening April 27. (In wide release.)

DIGGERS
A drama, directed by Katherine Dieckmann, about the vanishing livelihood of clam-digging on Long Island. Opening April 27. (Sunshine Cinema.)

ELECTION
In this thriller from Hong Kong, directed by Johnnie To, two gangsters compete to lead the mob. In Cantonese and Mandarin. Opening April 25. (Film Forum.)

THE INVISIBLE
A thriller, directed by David S. Goyer and starring Justin Chatwin, about a teen-ager who, after being assaulted, becomes invisible and pursues his attackers. Opening April 27. (In wide release.)

JINDABYNE
An Australian adaptation of a Raymond Carver story, about a man on a fishing trip who discovers a dead body. Starring Gabriel Byrne and Laura Linney. Directed by Ray Lawrence. Opening April 27. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

KICKIN' IT OLD SKOOL
In this comedy, directed by Harvey Glazer, a break-dancer (Jamie Kennedy) awakens from a twenty-year coma and must get used to today's world. Opening April 27. (In wide release.)

NEXT
Lee Tamahori directed this science-fiction thriller, about a clairvoyant man who is recruited to prevent nuclear terrorism in Los Angeles. Starring Nicolas Cage and Julianne Moore. Opening April 27. (In wide release.)

POISON FRIENDS
A drama, directed by Emmanuel Bourdieu, about a group of university students who fall under the influence of a seductive literary cohort. In French. Opening April 27. (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

SING NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR PEACE
A drama about the reunion of a college a-cappella group fifteen years after graduation. Opening April 27. (Village East Cinemas.)

SNOW CAKE
Sigourney Weaver and Alan Rickman star in this drama, about the relationship of an autistic woman and an introverted man. Directed by Marc Evans. Opening April 27. (Cinema Village.)

SOMETHING TO CHEER ABOUT
A documentary about the 1955 Crispus Attucks High School Tigers, the first all-black basketball team to win a state championship. Opening April 27. (Quad Cinema.)

TRIAD ELECTION
In this sequel to "Election," directed by Johnnie To, a candidate favored by mainland China seeks to take over a Hong Kong gang. In Mandarin and Cantonese. Opening April 25. (Film Forum.)

ZOO
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening April 25. (IFC Center.)

NOW PLAYING

DISTURBIA

Judged as an adolescent, suburban version of Hitchcock's extraordinarily sophisticated 1954 urban thriller "Rear Window," this movie, written by Christopher B. Landon and Carl Ellsworth and directed by D. J. Caruso, can rightly be called a travesty. The dopiness of it, however, may be an indication not so much of cinematic ineptitude as of the changes in a movie culture that was once devoted to adults and is now rather haplessly and redundantly devoted to kids. Shia LaBeouf, Sarah Roemer, and Aaron Yoo, aided by enough electronic equipment to open a Circuit City, spy on a suspected murderer (David Morse) living across the street. When he gets wise to them, the picture turns into a conventional (and at times effectively scary) horror movie, with splattered blood and corpses floating in some sort of basement vat.—*David Denby* (In wide release.)

GRINDHOUSE

A mixture of pop academicism and eternal-adolescent exuberance, this three-hour Quentin Tarantino–Robert Rodriguez tribute to the exploitation movies of the seventies includes two new junk features and such divertissements as trailers for imaginary pictures ("Werewolf Women of the S.S."), ads for nauseating food at local restaurants, and deep scratches on the film, as lovingly inscribed as the speckled antiquing on a blanket chest. In the Rodriguez feature, "Planet Terror," a dawn-of-the-dead fantasia, flesh melts, bodies explode like liquid packages squeezed too hard, testicles roll about on the ground. Some of this is fitfully amusing, but a loving re-creation of something tawdry is not all that different from the original. Even a postmodernist bloodbath is wet, sticky, and red. Tarantino's feature, "Death Proof," presents two lovable groups of women, the second of which takes on a mad stunt driver (Kurt Russell) in one of the most impressive car battles in movie history. Tarantino has his triumph, but he's caught in the contradictions of making an *hommage à schlock*—he can't decide whether to be a humanist or a nihilist, so he opportunistically becomes both. The directors did their own cinematography.—*D.D.* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/16/07.) (In wide release.)

THE HOAX

The barely believable tale of Clifford Irving. He was the joker who, in 1971, declared that he had been contacted by Howard Hughes, who needed a writer to help him with his memoirs. This was utterly untrue, but it didn't stop Irving (Richard Gere) and his corpulent, fretful sidekick, Dick Suskind (Alfred Molina), from extracting an advance of half a million dollars from a New York publisher, with the promise of more to come. The first half of Lasse Hallström's film, written by William Wheeler, zips through these frauds and grand delusions with glee; Hallström seems happier in such slippery company than he did with the sluggishness of "Chocolat" or "The Shipping News." The movie treads more heavily as the story proceeds, as the real Hughes intervenes and Irving apparently starts to lose his mind; yet the result, performed with gusto across the board, still makes a rich addition to the cinema of suckerdom. With Hope Davis and Stanley Tucci in fine fettle as the publishers who fall into the trap.—*Anthony Lane* (4/9/07) (In wide release.)

LONELY HEARTS

An explicit but sombre version of the sanguinary adventures of the real-life lovers Raymond Fernandez (Jared Leto) and Martha Beck (Salma Hayek), who in the late nineteen-forties ensnared lonely women (Ray, in thick toupee, was the fantasy Latin lover, and Martha his "sister"), fleeced them, and then killed them. The writer-director Todd Robinson is the grandson of the Long Island homicide detective Elmer Robinson (John Travolta), who, along with his loquacious partner, Charles Hildebrandt (James Gandolfini), led the investigation that eventually brought the pair down. Robinson splits the narrative between the cops and the killers; he wants us to understand what this kind of work takes out of the police, especially out of the taciturn Elmer, who was saddened and demoralized by the earlier suicide of his wife and who longs to find some meaning in his work. As the cheesy little stud, Leto is amazing, and when he takes off the toupee he's just an ordinary chain-smoking, henpecked-husband type. Salma Hayek is not much of an actress, but she encases Martha in pathological rage. The movie has a touching but finally wan desire for order and domestic peace.—*D.D.* (4/23/07) (In wide release.)

THE POLYMATH, OR THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF SAMUEL R. DELANY, GENTLEMAN

A brisk documentary, by Fred Barney Taylor, featuring the prolific science-fiction author and literary critic. Delany's novels, dim views of the future with an almost Shakespearean use of language, can be a dense and time-draining experience, so it comes as a nice surprise that Delany himself is a straightforward, no-holds-barred speaker. He recalls in vivid detail the black experience of the late forties and fifties in New York City and the particulars of his childhood in Harlem, where he was raised above his father's funeral parlor. Later, when he moved to the Lower East Side, he lived a gloriously promiscuous gay life while managing to write five novels by the time he was twenty-two. With his big white beard and bearish girth, Delany makes a warm impression, and Taylor's understated direction, featuring simple images that prod Delany's recollections gently along, makes the film a lively and thoughtful look at a deeply lived-in life.—*Bruce Diones* (Tribeca Film Festival; April 26, April 28-29, and May 3.)

THE PREMONITION

If the difference between an eccentric and a nut is money, Jean-Pierre Darroussin's drama illuminates the distinction with refined, austere wit. Darroussin also stars, as Charles Benesteau, a lawyer who, having received an ample inheritance, stopped practicing and moved to a small apartment in a rowdy part of Paris, where his money both protects and isolates him. An artistic soul without a specific talent, Charles fills notebooks with aperçus to no clear end. When a neighbor beats his wife unconscious and is arrested, Charles is thrust into good works concerning the couple's pubescent daughter, arousing the suspicion of gossiping neighbors. The tenuous plot, however, is completely beside the point. As Charles, Darroussin is awesomely lunar as the spiritual exile whose formal reserve and abstemious habits make him a walking anachronism; as director, he composes images as precise and fastidious as his performance. Shots of Charles tooling around town on his weighty, old-fashioned bicycle and of the city as he sees it, full of childlike wonder, achieve a rare depth of mood—of overwhelming emotion without

Lazhar Mansouri's mid-century portraits of Algerian villagers are at Westwood.

practical cause, which is the essence of Charles's character. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Tribeca Film Festival; April 26, April 28-29, and May 5.)

STILL LIFE

The ongoing Three Gorges Dam project, in southern China, has flooded vast areas of inhabited land and forced the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Chinese. Those and other heartbreaking dislocations are at the center of Jia Zhangke's drama, filmed on location among buildings slated for demolition before the water rises to engulf them. Han, a coal miner who had been away from his family for sixteen years, returns to his home town and finds that it has vanished, along with all traces of his daughter. Meanwhile Shen, a nurse, arrives in search of her husband, a nouveau-riche executive in the demolition business. Jia poignantly and angrily displays the degradations suffered by China's hordes of internal refugees, including the abusive intrusion of the police into family affairs, the freezing of emotion in the drive for money, and the soul-killing vapidity of the approved culture and the ubiquitous propaganda. The richly textured drama unfolds in images of calmly observed, accusatory directness; a few elements of digital magic lyrically, ironically punctuate the grinding materialism. In Mandarin.—*R.B.* (Tribeca Film Festival; April 28, April 30, May 2, and May 4-5.)

THERE'S ALWAYS TOMORROW

The psychological acuity of Douglas Sirk's direction turns this 1956 marital melodrama into an Ibsenesque tragedy. Cliff Groves (Fred MacMurray), a self-made California toy manufacturer whose wife, Marion (Joan Bennett), is preoccupied with their three children, is jolted from his routine by the visit of Norma Vale (Barbara Stanwyck), a former employee. Now a prominent New York fashion designer, Norma is a divorcée who, as Cliff discovers, has carried a torch for him since they last met, twenty years earlier. Dazzled by Norma's worldliness, Cliff is tempted to remake his life with her—but his teenagers get suspicious and prepare to take action of their own. Sirk, who began his career in prewar Germany, infused his Hollywood films with a consciously high-cultural sophistication and irony. With an outsider's sharp eye for American artifacts, he invokes "An American Tragedy," a vulgar stage show, and Cliff's pathetic new creation, Rex the Walkie-Talkie Robot, to expose the muffled cries of pain beneath the proprieties of suburban comfort. In contrast to the typical stoic masculinity of fifties Hollywood, this is "A Doll's House" for the sensitive, passionate married man.—*R.B.* (BAM; April 29.)

THE TV SET

"Truthfully, 'original' scares me a little," says Lenny (Sigourney Weaver), the TV network head in Jake Kasdan's sharp satirical comedy about the difficulties of getting a series off the ground. Lenny is the chief nemesis of Kasdan's hard-pressed hero, the writer-producer Mike Klein (David Duchovny), whose somewhat daring idea for a show gets squeezed by Lenny into a piece of conventional whimsy. Kasdan is shrewd and funny about such things as the intricate protocol on the set and the diverse ways that powerful people feign sincerity. The satire is unrelenting but not too broad; it stays close to common observation. Kasdan's special target: the astonishing Hollywood habit of presenting even the most negative opinions of a writer's or actor's work in initial upbeat panegyrics ("We loved it! Loved it!"), followed by the inevitable kicker, "But we have some concerns," which, it turns out, completely undermines whatever it was that the writer or actor was trying to do.—*D.D.* (4/16/07) (In wide release.)

YEAR OF THE DOG

Pencil, a lovely little beagle living in Los Angeles, dies when he eats something he shouldn't have, and his owner, Peggy (Molly Shannon), grief-struck, screws up at her job, brings home vicious and abandoned pooches, takes up the cause of animal activism, tries to get everyone in her life to adopt a pet, and, in general, withdraws from people and from the world. This first movie directed by Mike White, who wrote "The Good Girl" and "School of Rock," is devoted to the fixations not only of dog lovers but of corporate executives, man-obsessed friends, and parents. White poses his monomaniacs front and center with a lot of space around them and lets the actors (including Laura Dern and Peter Sarsgaard) speak their semi-satirical lines without interruption. He's trying for an effect of deadpan portraiture, and some of his writing has a surprising kick—a few words at the end of a seemingly conventional line that reveal the speaker's sweetly neurotic soul. Still, most of the movie is hard to sit through. Molly Shannon, of "Saturday Night Live," doesn't have much range or depth, and White's sensitivity becomes cloying. The meaning of the movie is: we're all creeps, so just accept your inner cripple and live with it—celebrate it, even.—*D.D.* (4/23/07) (In wide release.)

ZOO

In the state of Washington in 2005, a man died of a perforated colon after having sexual relations with a horse. Robinson Devor's impressionistic reconstruction of the events surrounding that incident is profoundly compassionate yet oddly frustrating. Using audio interviews with members of the zoophile community who gathered there due to the state's lack, at the time, of laws against bestiality, Devor and the co-writer, Charles Mudede, restage with actors (as well as an acquaintance of the deceased who was willing to appear on camera) things as they seemed to the participants, not a full view of things as they were. The vague and tendentious method parses the story in terms of pleasure-seekers victimized by the forces of repression, yet when one zoophile equates his love for horses to other men's love for their wives and children, questions of morality and perspective arise which Devor scrupulously avoids. He conveys his awe of the mystery and the tyranny of desire, but in his empathetic effort to normalize it, he flattens and sentimentalizes the story.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

Also Playing

FRACTURE: In wide release. **PERFECT STRANGER:** In wide release. **STEPHANIE DALEY:** Angelika Film Center. **SYNDROMES AND A CENTURY:** IFC Center. **VACANCY:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. April 27, April 30, and May 1 at 7 and 9 and April 28-29 at 5, 7, and 9: "The Short Life of José Antonio Gutierrez" (2006, Heidi Specogna). ♦ Special screening. April 27 at 8: "La Raison Avant la Passion" (1968-69, Joyce Wieland). ♦ "Essential Cinema." The films of Georges Méliès. All films are silent. April 28 at 6: Program 1, including "A Trip to the Moon" (1902). ♦ April 29 at 6: Program 2, including "A Diabolical Tenant" (1909). ♦ April 29 at 7:30: Program 3, including "Tunnel Under the Channel" (1907).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Barbara Stanwyck. April 25 at 7: "Baby Face" (1933, Alfred E. Green) and "Ladies They Talk About" (1933, Howard Bretherton and William Keighley). ♦ April 26 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Remember the Night" (1940, Mitchell Leisen). ♦ April 27 at 6:50 and 9:30: "The Strange Love of Martha Ivers" (1946, Lewis Milestone). ♦ April 28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Ball of Fire" (1941, Howard Hawks). ♦ April 29 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "There's Always Tomorrow" (†). ♦ May 1 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "All I Desire" (1953, Douglas Sirk). ♦ Special screening. April 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The River" (1951, Jean Renoir).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. April 27-May 8 at 1, 3:15, 5:40, 7:50, and 10: "The Earrings of Madame de . . ." (1953, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ Through May 17: "Vintage 007 and '60s Spies A-Go-Go." April 27-28 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "Goldfinger" (1964, Guy Hamilton). The 7:30 and 9:40 shows will be followed by a sing-along. ♦ April 29 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "Dr. No" (1962, Terence Young). ♦ April 30 at 1:45, 5:35, and 9:25: "Danger: Diabolik" (1968, Mario Bava). ♦ April 30 at 3:40 and 7:30: "Fathom" (1967, Leslie H. Martinson). ♦ May 1 at 1:40, 4:20, 7, and 9:40: "Live and Let Die" (1973, Guy Hamilton).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Fanny Ardant. May 1 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Callas Forever" (2002, Franco Zeffirelli; in English, French, and Italian). The 7:30 screening will be introduced by Ardant.

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Fares to Remember: Taxi 07." April 27-29 at noon: "99 River Street" (1953, Phil Karlson). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." April 27-28: "Night on Earth" (1991, Jim Jarmusch).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"India Now." April 27 at 6: "A Cry in the Dark" (2006, Haobam Paban Kumar; in Manipuri and English). ♦ April 28 at 2: "Dor" (2006, Nagesh Kukunoor; in Hindi). ♦ April 28 at 6:15 and April 30 at 5:30: "A Grave-Keeper's Tale" (2006, Chitra Palekar; in Marathi). April 28 at 8:30: "Zero Zone" (2006, Arindam Mitra; in Hindi). ♦ Films from "The Pervert's Guide to Cinema." April 25 at 6: "Duck Soup" (1933, Leo McCarey). ♦ April 26 at 6: "The Birds" (1963, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ April 27 at 6: "Wild at Heart" (1990, David Lynch). ♦ April 28 at 4:30: "Dr. Strangelove" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Special screening. April 29 at 4:30: "Privilege" (1990, Yvonne Rainer).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screening. April 27 at 5: "Darling" (1965, John Schlesinger). ♦ Preview screening. April 27 at 7:30: "Away from Her" (2006, Sarah Polley), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ The films of William S. Hart. All films are silent. April 28 at 2: "Branding Broadway" (1918). ♦ April 28 at 4: "Wagon Tracks" (1919, Lambert Hillyer). ♦ April 29 at 2: "The Toll Gate" (1920, Hillyer).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." April 27 at 9:30: "Winter Light" (1962, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish), introduced by Alexei Kaleina.

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." April 27-28: "Gremlins" (1984, Joe Dante).

TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL

Screenings are held at locations throughout New York; for more program information and complete schedule, call 866-941-3378 or visit www.tribecafilmfestival.org. April 26 at 3:15 and 10:30, April 28 at 3, April 29 at 10:30, and May 3 at 10:45: "The Polymath, or the Life and Opinions of Samuel R. Delany, Gentleman" (†). ♦ April 26 at 4, April 30 at 9:45, May 2 at 8, and May 5 at 5: "The King of Kong" (2006, Seth Gordon). ♦ April 26 at 4, April 28 at 11:30 A.M., April 29 at 11, and May 5 at 8: "The Premonition" (†). ♦ April 26 at 6:15, April 28 at 1:30, May 1 at 11, May 4 at 11 A.M., and May 5 at 7: "Making Of" (2006, Nouri Bouzid; in Arabic). ♦ April 26 at 8:30, April 27 at 10:15, April 29 at 9:30, and May 1 at 2:45: "Lady Chatterley" (2006, Pascale Ferran; in French). ♦ April 27 at 5:15, April 29 at 7:30, April 30 at 4, May 2 at 10:30, and May 5 at 10:15 A.M.: "Two in One" (2006, Kira Muratova; in Russian). ♦ April 27 at 7:45, April 30 at 9:30, May 1 at 3, and May 4 at 11 A.M.: "Half Moon" (2006, Bahman Ghobadi; in Kurdish and Farsi). ♦ April 28 at 2:30, April 30 and May 2 at 7, May 4 at 7:30, and May 5 at 8:30: "Still Life" (†). ♦ April 27 at 8, April 28 at 7 and 10, and April 29 at 3: "Passio" (2007, Paolo Cherchi Usai; silent), accompanied by a live musical performance.

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through May 3: The films of Carlos Saura. All films are in Spanish. April 25 at 1:30 and April 29 at 2: "Blood Wedding" (1981). ♦ April 25 at 8:30: "Mama Turns 100" (1979). ♦ April 26 at 1 and April 29 at 4:25: "Carmen" (1983). ♦ April 26 at 3 and April 27 at 8:50: "The Stilts" (1984). ♦ April 26 at 5 and April 30 at 9: "The Dark Night" (1989). ♦ April 27 at 6:45: "Cria" (1976). ♦ April 28 at 7:30 and April 30 at 1 and 5: "Ay, Carmela!" (1992). ♦ April 28 at 9:30 and April 30 at 3 and 7: "Flamenco" (1995). ♦ April

RACHEL DOMM

29 at 6:30: "Love the Magician" (1986). ♦ May 1 at 2 and 6:20: "Goya in Bordeaux" (1990). ♦ May 1 at 4:15 and 8:30: "The 7th Day" (2004).

READINGS AND TALKS

192 BOOKS
The *New Yorker* writer John McPhee offers selections from his book about the freight-transport business, "Uncommon Carriers." He'll be joined by his daughter Martha McPhee, who will read from her latest novel, "L'America." (Tenth Ave. at 21st St. April 25 at 7.)

BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The poets L. S. Asekoff, Jessica Greenbaum, D. Nurkse, Sapphire, and Vijay Seshadri celebrate the publication of "Broken Land: Poems of Brooklyn." (128 Pierrepont St. 718-222-4111. April 25 at 7.)

TRIBUTE TO CÉSAR VALLEJO
The actor Sam Shepard joins Jayne Cortez, Clayton Eshleman, Forrest Gander, Edward Hirsch, Mónica de la Torre, Anne Waldman, and other poets for a reading from "César Vallejo: The Complete Poetry," which Eshleman recently finished translating after forty-eight years of work. (The Poetry Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door. April 26 at 8.)

SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE POETRY FESTIVAL
More than fifty poets, including Yusef Komunyakaa, Susan Howe, and Philip Levine, read from their work during this weekend-long gathering just outside the city's border. The poet-turned-rocker Paul Muldoon and his garage band, Rackett, will also perform. (For more information, visit www.slc.edu/poetry-festival. April 27-29.)

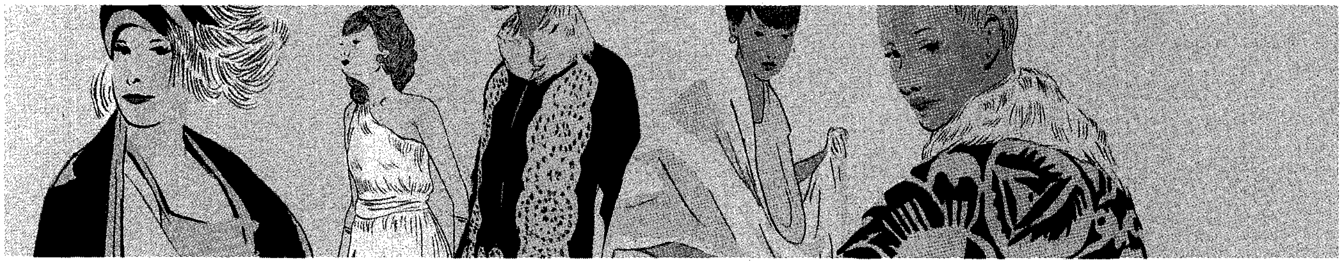
SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM
Martha LaGuardia-Kotite, a commander in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserves and the author of "So Others May Live," gives an illustrated lecture on the dangers and joys of her job as a rescue swimmer. (12 Fulton St. 212-748-8568. April 28 at 2.)

"READING BETWEEN A & B"
The poets Jorie Graham, Claudia Keelan, and Meghan O'Rourke read from their work at the Eleventh Street Bar, in the East Village. (510 E. 11th St. No tickets necessary. April 30 at 7:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"SAKURA MATSURI"
In Japan, where the fleeting cherry blossom (*sakura*) is a popular symbol of the ephemeral nature of life, the cultural tradition known as *hanami* celebrates the monthlong cherry-blossom season, from bud to bloom and to the inevitable shower of pink petals. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden, which has more than two hundred and twenty cherry trees in forty-two different varieties, holds a cherry-blossom festival annually, at the expected peak of the season. The garden's "Sakura Matsuri" takes place this year from April 28 to April 29, from noon to 6, with *taiko* drumming, tea ceremonies, and other Japanese activities. (Washington Ave. at Eastern Parkway. For more information, call 718-623-7200 or visit www.bbg.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Both of the big houses hold auctions of important jewels this week, but the real treasure at **Sotheby's** is its sale of photographs from the private collection of Margaret (Maggi) W. Weston (April 25-26), who opened her legendary Weston gallery in Carmel in 1975 and became a significant figure in raising awareness about (and the value of) the art form. The collection, which is rich in works by California photographers, images by Ansel Adams, European modernist photographs, and just about everything else, is highlighted by two stunning Edward Weston prints, "The Ascent of Attic Angels" and "The White Iris (Tina Modotti)," both from 1921. A more general auction (on April 26) is especially strong in works by Diane Arbus. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The Baroda Pearls, an extraordinary two-strand necklace of perfectly matched and graduated natural pearls once owned by a nineteenth-century maharaja, lead **Christie's** sale of jewels (April 25), which is followed by one of pocket watches and wristwatches (April 26). Next week opens with two print sales (May 1-2), a large general one—with works by Haring, Warhol, and Dubuffet, among others—and a specialized auction of Belle Époque prints from the collection of the large security firm Guardsmark, LLC. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Phillips** holds one of its well-represented photograph sales (April 25); this one offers works from various private and institutional collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, as well as fourteen contemporary Chinese works from the collection of Lawrence and Kathy Schiller. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)



Paul Poiret at the Met's Costume Institute.

ON THE HORIZON

ART
DRESSED TO THRILL
May 9-Aug. 5

In the early twentieth century, Paris's most fashionable women (as well as those from other countries lucky enough to make shopping trips to the City of Light) dressed in Paul Poiret's colorful and daring dresses and suits. The Met's Costume Institute explores the career of the man who revived the Empire waistline, introduced the hobble skirt, and made a fad of Orientalism. (212-535-7710.)

THE THEATRE
MIND AND MONEY
May 11

Sigourney Weaver stars in the world première of "Crazy Mary," a new play by A. R. Gurney, about a wealthy woman from Buffalo and her college-aged son, who visit a cousin in a mental institution. (212-279-4200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SONGFEST
May 12-13

This year, City Opera's annual "Vox" festival of new operas, presented in league with four smaller New York companies, includes scenes from works by such prominent composers as John Zorn, Jenny Olivia Johnson, Derek Bermel, and Brian Current. (No tickets required.)

MOVIES
HARD CASE
May 12-June 10

Gravel-voiced Samuel Fuller, the streetwise journalist and pulp-fiction writer, was Hollywood's low-budget poet of violence. From "I Shot Jesse James" (1949) through "The Naked Kiss" (1964), he staged gunshots and fisticuffs with exuberance even while reviling them in his liberal scripts. Moving Image offers a near-complete retrospective, including most of his later, European films. (718-784-0077.)

NIGHT LIFE
REMEMBERING JOEY
May 19

The celebration of the late Joey Ramone's birthday at the Fillmore at Irving Plaza, an annual highlight for leather-clad punk rockers of all ages, promises to be even more poignant this year, following the death, this past January, of his mother, Charlotte Lesher. (212-777-6800.)

Advertisement

[*Two Nights — One Day*]

THE NEW YORKER

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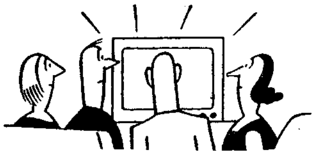
JOHNNIE WALKER.

THE NEW YORKER

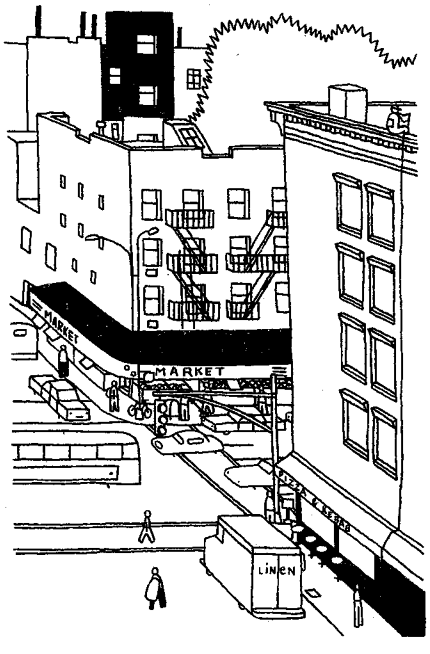
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
SHOOTINGS



The cell phones in the pockets of the dead students were still ringing when we were told that it was wrong to ask why. As the police cleared the bodies from the Virginia Tech engineering building, the cell phones rang, in the eccentric varieties of ring tones, as parents kept trying to see if their children were O.K. To imagine the feelings of the police as they carried the bodies and heard the ringing is heartrending; to imagine the feelings of the parents who were calling—dread, desperate hope for a sudden answer and the bliss of reassurance, dawning grief—is unbearable. But the parents, and the rest of us, were told that it was not the right moment to ask how the shooting had happened—specifically, why an obviously disturbed student, with a history of mental illness, was able to buy guns whose essential purpose is to kill people—and why it happens over and over again in America. At a press conference, Virginia's governor, Tim Kaine, said, "People who want to . . . make it their political hobby horse to ride, I've got nothing but loathing for them. . . . At this point, what it's about is comforting family members . . . and helping this community heal. And so to those who want to try to make this into some little crusade, I say take that elsewhere."

If the facts weren't so horrible, there might be something touching in the Governor's deeply American belief that "healing" can take place magically, without the intervening practice called "treating." The logic is unusual but striking: the aftermath of a terrorist attack is the wrong time to talk about security, the aftermath of a death from lung cancer is the wrong time to talk about smoking and the tobacco industry, and the aftermath of a car crash is the wrong time to talk about seat belts. People talked about the shooting, of course, but much of the conversation was devoted to musings on the treatment of mental illness in universities, the problem of "narcissism," violence in the media and in popular culture, copycat killings, the alienation of immigrant students, and the question of Evil.



Some people, however—especially people outside America—were eager to talk about it in another way, and even to embark on a little crusade. The whole world saw that the United States has more gun violence than other countries because we have more guns and are willing to sell them to madmen who want to kill people. Every nation has violent loners, and they tend to have remarkably similar profiles from one country and culture to the next. And every country has known the horror of having a lunatic get his hands on a gun and kill innocent people. But on a recent list of the fourteen worst mass shootings in Western democracies since the nineteen-sixties the United States claimed seven, and, just as important, no other country on the list has had a repeat performance as severe as the first.

In Dunblane, Scotland, in 1996, a gunman killed sixteen children and a teacher at their school. Afterward, the British gun laws, already restrictive, were tightened—it's now against the law for any private citizen in the United Kingdom to own the kinds of guns that Cho Seung-Hui used at Virginia Tech—and nothing like Dunblane has occurred there since. In Quebec, after a school shooting took the lives of fourteen women in 1989, the survivors helped begin a gun-control movement that resulted in legislation bringing stronger, though far from sufficient, gun laws to

LAURENT CILLUFFO

Canada. (There have been a couple of subsequent shooting sprees, but on a smaller scale, and with far fewer dead.) In the Paris suburb of Nanterre, in 2002, a man killed eight people at a municipal meeting. Gun control became a key issue in the Presidential election that year, and there has been no repeat incident.

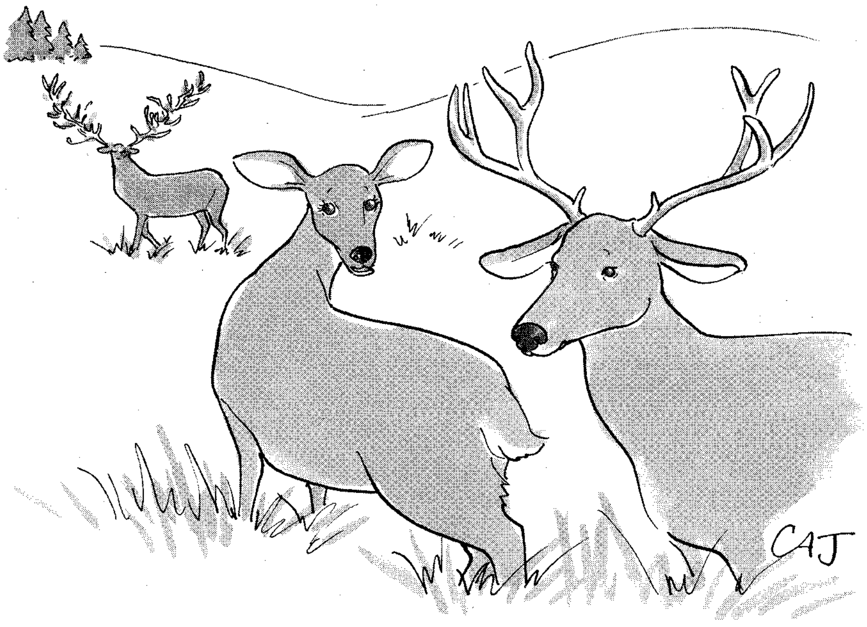
So there is no American particularity about loners, disenfranchised immigrants, narcissism, alienated youth, complex moral agency, or Evil. There is an American particularity about guns. The arc is apparent. Forty years ago, a man killed fourteen people on a college campus in Austin, Texas; this year, a man killed thirty-two in Blacksburg, Virginia. Not enough was done between those two massacres to make weapons of mass killing harder to obtain. In fact, while campus killings continued—Columbine being the most notorious, the shooting in the one-room Amish schoolhouse among the most recent—weapons have got more lethal, and, in states like Virginia, where the N.R.A. is powerful, no harder to buy.

Reducing the number of guns available to crazy people will neither relieve them of their insanity nor stop them from killing. Making it more difficult to buy guns that kill people is, however, a rational way to reduce the number of people killed by guns. Nations with tight gun laws have, on the whole, less gun violence; countries with somewhat restrictive gun laws have some gun violence; countries with essentially no gun laws have a lot of gun violence. (If you work hard, you can find a statistical exception hiding in a corner, but exceptions are just that. Some people who smoke their whole lives don't get lung cancer, while some people who never smoke do; still, the best way not to get lung cancer is not to smoke.)

It's true that in renewing the expired ban on assault weapons we can't guarantee that someone won't shoot people with a semi-automatic pistol, and that by controlling semi-automatic pistols we can't reduce the chances of someone killing people with a rifle. But the point of lawmaking is not to act as precisely as possible, in order to punish the latest crime; it is to act as comprehensively as possible, in order to prevent the next one. Semi-automatic Glocks and Walthers, Cho's weapons, are for killing people. They are not made for hunting, and it's not easy to protect yourself with them. (If having a loaded semi-automatic on hand kept you safe, cops would not be shot as often as they are.)

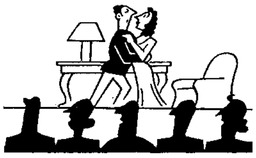
Rural America is hunting country, and hunters need rifles and shotguns—with proper licensing, we'll live with the risk. There is no reason that any private citizen in a democracy should own a handgun. At some point, that simple truth will register. Until it does, phones will ring for dead children, and parents will be told not to ask why.

—*Adam Gopnik*



"It's not you—it's natural selection."

THE BOARDS
SEX AND REAL ESTATE



Plays about architects don't have much of a track record in New York, at least not since Ibsen's "The Master Builder." In January, the *Times* dismissed a new play about Frank Lloyd Wright as a "dreary drama" that focussed too much on Wright's tirades against contractors, a subject that, however easy it may be for people to identify with, doesn't make for stirring theatre. But things might turn out differently for "The Glass House," a new play that explores the story of Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, which was completed in 1951, outside Chicago, if only because it is a play about architecture only in the sense that "A Streetcar Named Desire" is a play about public transit. "The Glass House" explores the romantic relationship between a female client and a male architect that merely happens to have, at its center, one of the most famous houses in history. The tensions between Dr. Edith Farnsworth, who dreamed of commissioning a great work of architecture, and Mies van der Rohe, who seduced her into letting him build the house he wanted, represent the stresses of almost every client-architect relationship. "It is the story of people who were together for five years and built this wonderful house, and then they sued each other," June Finfer, the playwright, said the other day.

"The Glass House" is being produced by two brothers, a director and an architect. Kyle Bergman, the architect, came upon the play first, almost by accident. A couple of years ago, he had contacted Finfer, who is a filmmaker in Chicago, to see if he could use her documentary about Mies van der Rohe's Tugendhat House, in the Czech Republic, in an architectural film festival that he was planning. "You know, I've written a play about Mies, too," Finfer recalls telling Bergman. She sent him the script, which he passed on to his brother Evan, the director. "When I

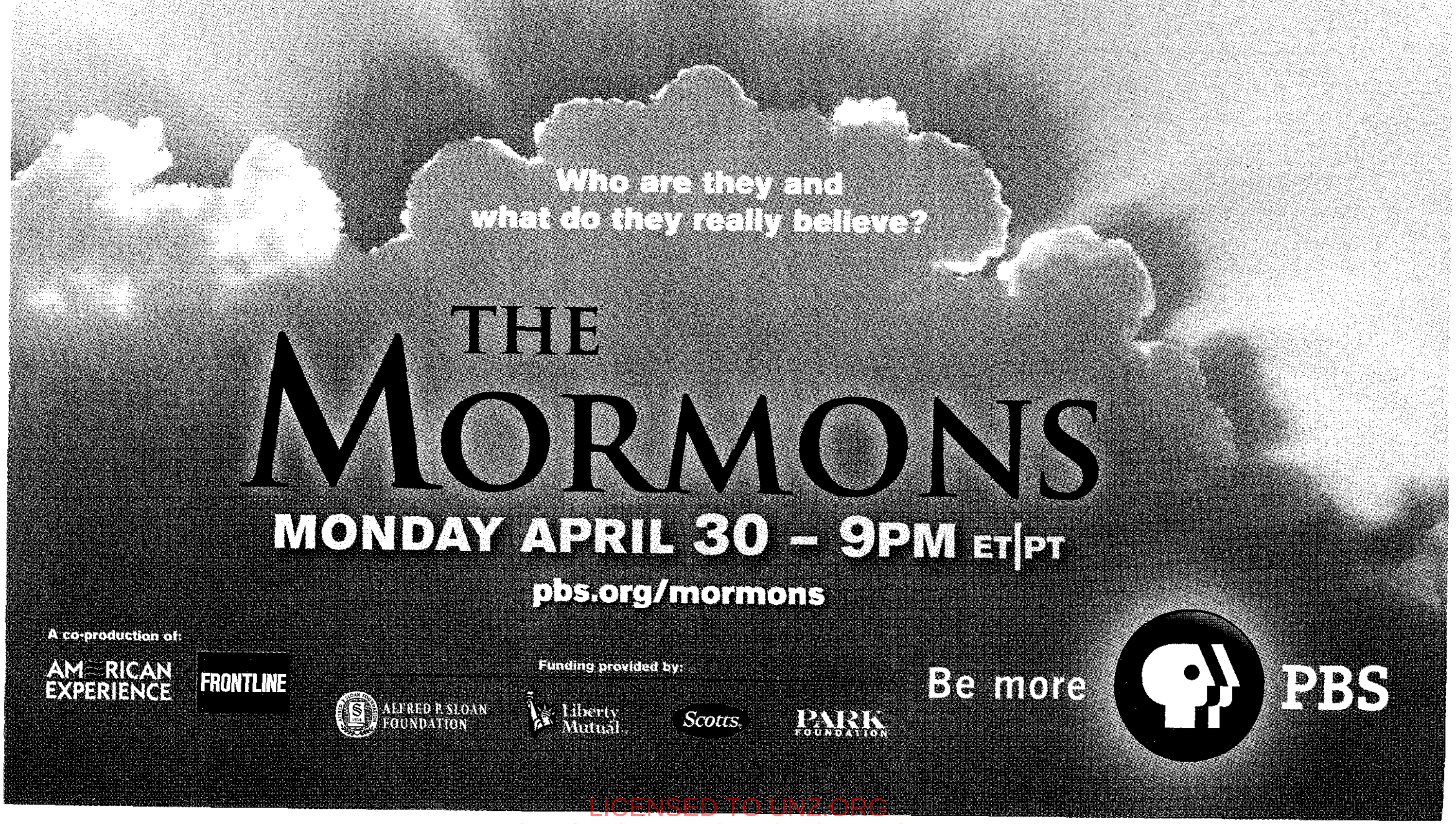
MORMONS ARE ______________________

THEY BELIEVE IN ______________________

PEOPLE FEARED THEM BECAUSE __________

THEY ARE FORBIDDEN TO ______________

It's time to fill in the blanks.



Who are they and
what do they really believe?

THE MORMONS

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read it, the characters popped out at me so much that I called June Finfer and told her I wanted to get on a plane to Chicago right away and meet her," Evan Bergman said.

Finfer and the Bergmans hit it off. She gave them an option on the play, and, together with Evan, who recently directed "Machiavelli" Off Broadway, started refining the script. The Mies van der Rohe-designed Illinois Institute of Technology campus, in Chicago, hosted a reading. Then, the brothers set up a pair of staged readings in New York.

Kyle didn't want them to feel like backers' auditions, so he invited everyone he knew from the architecture world. At the first reading, two weeks ago at Lincoln Center's Rose Theatre, Hilary Lewis, an architectural historian who has written books about Philip Johnson, showed up. (Johnson is a character in the play.) So did Christy MacLear, who is in charge of Johnson's Glass House in Connecticut. They watched Edith Farnsworth fall in love with Mies, hire him to build what would turn out to be a house of sublime beauty, and then become enraged as costs soared and the architect, with the house nearly complete, withdrew from their relationship and returned to his longtime girlfriend, Lora Marx, but not before refusing to allow Farnsworth to bring her own furniture and art into the house, insisting that they would destroy the purity of his design. Farnsworth banned him from the house, whereupon he sued her for unpaid fees, and she countersued, claiming that the building was defective. Mies won the suit, but never again visited the house.

"People say I'm a fool to build this house," Edith Farnsworth says in the play.

"You said you wanted to advance the art of architecture," Mies responds.

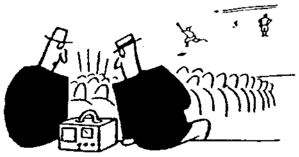
"I did, but I thought you were building a house for me," Farnsworth says. "My house is a monument to Mies van der Rohe, and I am paying for it."

"When you hire a great artist, you are supposed to be thrilled with what you get," Philip Johnson tells Farnsworth. "Would you tell Picasso what to paint?"

—*Paul Goldberger*

ON THE AIR

PINCH-HITTERS



There was a lot to talk about last week. You had the Mets, riding high. Yankees-Red Sox, always good. A-Rod. Basketball playoffs (Knick-less again), hockey playoffs (you start with the goaltending), even tennis, if you're into it. And that's not including the *news* news, the serious non-sports stuff.

When Don Imus was fired from his radio show, two weeks ago, WFAN, his home station, suddenly had four and a half hours of morning airtime to fill. This had been the only portion of WFAN's day that wasn't devoted to sports, but the station, in a pinch, turned to its longtime afternoon sports-talk duo of Mike Francesa and Chris Russo, known as Mike and the Mad Dog, to sub in, while it considered its next move. Last week, listeners who alighted on 660 AM, or on several dozen other stations around the country that had carried Imus, experienced the odd sensation of hearing Mike and the Mad Dog, with the help of Imus's erstwhile sidekick Charles McCord, dissect the news from the front page as well as the back. It was like a blizzard in July.

The dominant subject, of course, was the shootings at Virginia Tech, or "Va-Tech," as Russo kept saying. They addressed it with the same blend of solemnity and umbrage with which they usually assess an unorthodox draft pick or a flubbed sacrifice bunt. As Francesa noted (after Russo asked, referring to the shooter, "Do we knock the authorities here for not doing a better job of keeping an eye on him?"), "It's a very difficult situation."

MAD DOG: Unlike Whitman, that's the guy in 1966, Texas, where I don't think there was any idea that he could do this, this kid seems like—now, I know it seems like Monday morning quarterbacking, and we're not at Va-Tech—but it seems like that Roy teacher who came out and talked, and now Mike gives you a few more teachers, uh, this kid had some issues here. I mean, did you think he was gonna be a time bomb waiting to happen? Maybe not that much, but—you were worried about him. You were very worried about him. I don't know what the parent scenario is. . . . But there are some issues here, no question about it.

Among those issues, which Mike and the Mad Dog revisited throughout the week, were gun control (Mad Dog: "You can't hand it to him on a silver platter: 'Here's the gun' "); the shooter's family ("You wanna give the parents some culpability here?"); and NBC's decision to broadcast the video footage that the killer had made of himself (Mad Dog: "I would not have touched it." Mike: "I'm sure a lot of people feel that way, but the bottom line in that company is when it comes down to dollars and cents and ratings they're gonna play that. . . . Bottom line is, and I'll say this, there is no broadcasting entity anywhere in the world that would not have done the same thing").

Fortunately, Mike and the Mad Dog did not take up the Supreme Court's abortion ruling, the United Nations report on Sudan, or the Senate Judiciary Committee's drubbing of Alberto Gonzales. But they did have some things to say about the injuries to New Jersey's governor, Jon Corzine (Mike: "If you've ever had a rib broken in your life—and I have—it's very painful." Mad Dog: "Very painful"), and about his temporary replacement, Richard Codey (Mad Dog: "Codey's gonna be the governor there for a long time." Mike: "He does a good job, too"). And they talked, as they often do even in the afternoon, about "The Sopranos," in a way that suggested that they might be projecting.

MIKE: Gandolfini is a great actor.
MAD DOG: He's great for that show.
MIKE: He does a great job in that part.
MAD DOG: But he has to prove now that he can do a good role outside of "The Sopranos."
MIKE: Plus, talk about being a stereotype. Tony Soprano's become one of the biggest characters—I mean, he's like Archie Bunker. He's become one of the biggest figures in the history of television.
MAD DOG: Remember, Archie Bunker went from there to "In the Heat of the Night."
MIKE: He did.
MAD DOG: Where he did a great job. He did move on.
MIKE: But to a lot of people he was always Archie Bunker. Just like George Reeves was always Superman.
MAD DOG: But Reeves was not a great actor. Carroll O'Connor was a great actor. Gandolfini, I'm with you, but he's gotta show that he can do that great role outside of Tony Soprano.

Francesa and Russo were double-shifting; they were still on in the afternoon, so between shows they had four hours to kill.

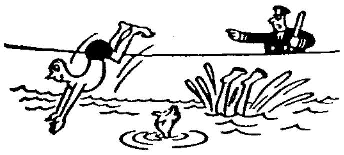
Francesa drove home each day to Long Island from the WFAN studios, in Queens, for lunch and a nap. Russo got out as often as he could. On Thursday, he played tennis with Patrick McEnroe. He returned to the studio forty-five minutes before going back on the air, and indulged a visitor with some unbroadcast talk, while down the hall, in Imus's old office, a moving crew boxed up Imus's belongings.

Russo remarked that the Virginia Tech story, terrible though it was, had provided them with morning fodder. "We haven't really had a clean, Mike-and-the-Mad-Dog-no-screwing-around-let's-talk-sports type of morning," he said. "We're basically flying by the seat of our pants. This week, I don't have to worry about preparing, because all I have to do is make sure I know what's going on with Virginia Tech. I read the *Times*. I make sure I know what's cooking. Do I know about the Attorney General? No, I do not. Would I have to know, if I was doing this show regularly? I don't know if I would. . . . People don't wanna hear me do that stuff anyway. They wanna hear me do sports. They wanna hear Russo be Russo."

Ten minutes before airtime, Francesa rolled in. They took up their positions, and Francesa got them started: "You wanna go hockey or basketball?" Russo, being Russo, chose the latter.

—Nick Paumgarten

SAFETY FIRST DEPT.
EVERYBODY IN!



Judging from the scale of this year's recruitment campaign, it would seem that the city's lifeguard shortage—always a problem—has reached crisis levels. "We have our standards," Liam Kavanagh, the first deputy commissioner of Parks and Recreation, said the other day, of the effort to hire twelve hundred new lifeguards ($11.72 per hour). "We send flyers to the schools, community boards, the Y.M.C.A., the Boys' Club. We've done bus-shelter ads with our 'Whistle Worthy' logo. And then there are the chairs"—fourteen-foot-tall aluminum lifeguard chairs, plunked into temporary sandboxes around town and hung with recruitment posters. "We try to be strategic."

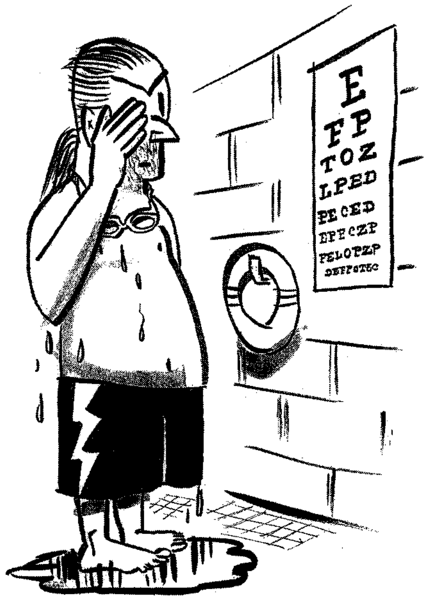
They also threw a kickoff party in Union Square (the temperature was in the forties), with Beach Boys songs and seagull sounds playing on speakers, and put out a call for lifeguards from abroad. (The *Times* of London asked, "Are you fit, free this summer, a degree student, and fancy yourself as a bit of a David Hasselhoff or Pamela Anderson?") "Last year, the majority came from Eastern Europe—much to our surprise," Kavanagh said, "Poland and Russia, in particular" (a vestige, he guessed, of the Soviet physical-education system).

Native contenders have to pass through the West Fifty-ninth Street Recreation Center, where official city swim tests are administered. To qualify, you must be sixteen or older and have at least 20/30 vision in one eye and 20/40 vision in the other. You must also be able to stay afloat for one minute in eight feet of water without using your hands, a requirement that is harder than it seems, as Javier Rodriguez, a lifeguard coördinator, explained before a recent session. "You have people whose perception of swimming is not what most of us here would consider swimming," he said. Rodriguez, who is tall, with a mustache, and was wearing flowered swim trunks, has been a lifeguard since 1979. "Kids, they jump in, they go to the bottom. You take out a shepherd's crook, and you hook 'em." Behind him on a chalkboard in the pool area, some training instructions were visible:

Amputation
1. Treat victim
2. Find part(s)
3. Part → bag

Among the hopefuls at a recent test session was Reinford Richards, forty-four, a construction worker originally from Jamaica ("Is this a young-person thing?"); Christopher Banks, a football player and snowboarder from Manhattan ("I think girls would like to meet somebody who's watching out for people"); and Latanya Waluyn, a nursing assistant with a yellow bathing cap and the words "Quiet Storm" tattooed on her neck ("I told my friend I might become a lifeguard, and she was like, 'Are you crazy? The waves can take you out!' ").

First in line one recent Wednesday night was Lance Velez, thirty-three, a night-club promoter from Queens. He had a brown ponytail and a thin beard, and he wore shorts with a lightning bolt down the side. He'd seen an ad for lifeguards in the *Village Voice*. "I just thought, I like to be in the sun. I like to go swimming," he said. "And the girls don't hurt. Growing up, I watched 'Baywatch' a lot. I liked Traci Bingham—that's the girl from 'The Surreal Life'—and, of course, Pamela Anderson. Good-looking girls in tight red bathing suits."



Velez passed the eye exam and moved on to the swim test: two and a half pool lengths—fifty yards—in thirty-five seconds. He started doing the crawl, a little stiffly.

"He probably hasn't been in the water for a while," Rodriguez said as he watched, arms folded. "You'll notice that he's going to start bringing his head up, because he's going to need to breathe more. You see his head position? It's very difficult to swim like that."

Velez finished the trial and hoisted himself out of the pool. "It's been a while since I did that," he said, panting.

A lifeguard coördinator read him the rundown: "You were a little slow—40.3 seconds. Also, the breathing was a little bit off. You've gotta turn to your side."

Velez squeezed the water out of his ponytail. He said he would be back: "I'm going to go to the gym every night. It'll take a couple weeks for me to get back into shape." He walked to the locker room along the length of the pool, where a group of trainee lifeguards—people who had passed the test—were practicing inverted scissor kicks.

—Lizzie Widdicombe

TOM BACHTELL

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
IT'S THE WORKFORCE, STUPID!

In the nineteen-nineties, with U.S. corporations in the midst of what the *Times* called "the downsizing of America," a new term appeared: the "seven-per-cent rule." It was a simple formula: when a company announces major layoffs, its stock price jumps seven per cent. No one worried too much about whether the rule was accurate—it was a catchy way of expressing a basic assumption about corporate layoffs: downsizing is an easy way to make Wall Street happy. So when, recently, two companies with lagging stock prices—Circuit City and Citigroup—announced major job cuts, one might have expected their stock to soar. Instead, Circuit City saw its stock price tumble four per cent the day after it announced it was getting rid of thirty-four hundred of its most experienced sales associates, and Citigroup's stock barely budged when it said it would be cutting seventeen thousand jobs.

This may have surprised the executives who had planned the cutbacks, but it shouldn't have. Over the past decade, many academics have looked at how layoffs affect stock prices, and they've found that the seven-per-cent rule is bunk. Instead of rising sharply, the stock of companies that trim their workforces is likely to fall. A recent meta-study that surveyed research from several countries, covering thousands of layoff announcements, concluded that, on average, markets had "a significantly negative" reaction to job cuts. Individual companies, of course, sometimes see stock prices jump after layoff news, but there's no evidence that downsizing is a guaranteed hit with investors.

This isn't to say that Wall Street has gone soft—it still cares about profits, not people. But investors seem to understand that fewer people doesn't always mean more profits. Downsizing may make companies temporarily more productive, but the gains quickly erode, in part because of the predictably negative effect on morale. And numerous studies suggest that, despite the lower payroll costs, layoffs do not make firms more profitable; Wayne Cascio, a management professor at the University of Colorado at Denver, looked at more than three hundred firms that downsized in the nineteen-eighties and found that three years after the layoffs the companies' returns on assets, costs, and profit margins had not improved. It's possible that these companies would have done even worse had they not downsized, but for the average company the effect of layoffs on the bottom line appears to be negligible.

If the track record of layoffs in improving corporate performance and shareholder returns is so mediocre, why do executives still find them tempting? One reason is that executives' view of downsizing is shaped by what's sometimes called the vividness heuristic: the tendency to give undue weight to particularly vivid or newsworthy examples. In discussions of downsizing, you don't often hear about all the companies that cut payrolls and then continued to struggle. Instead, it's the stories of companies that have reaped dramatic benefits from downsizing—like G.E. and Procter & Gamble—that become templates for how the process works. Executive overconfidence exacerbates this problem: a C.E.O. is far more likely to see himself as capable of pulling off what Jack Welch did at G.E. than to recognize the probability that layoffs will make only a trivial difference.

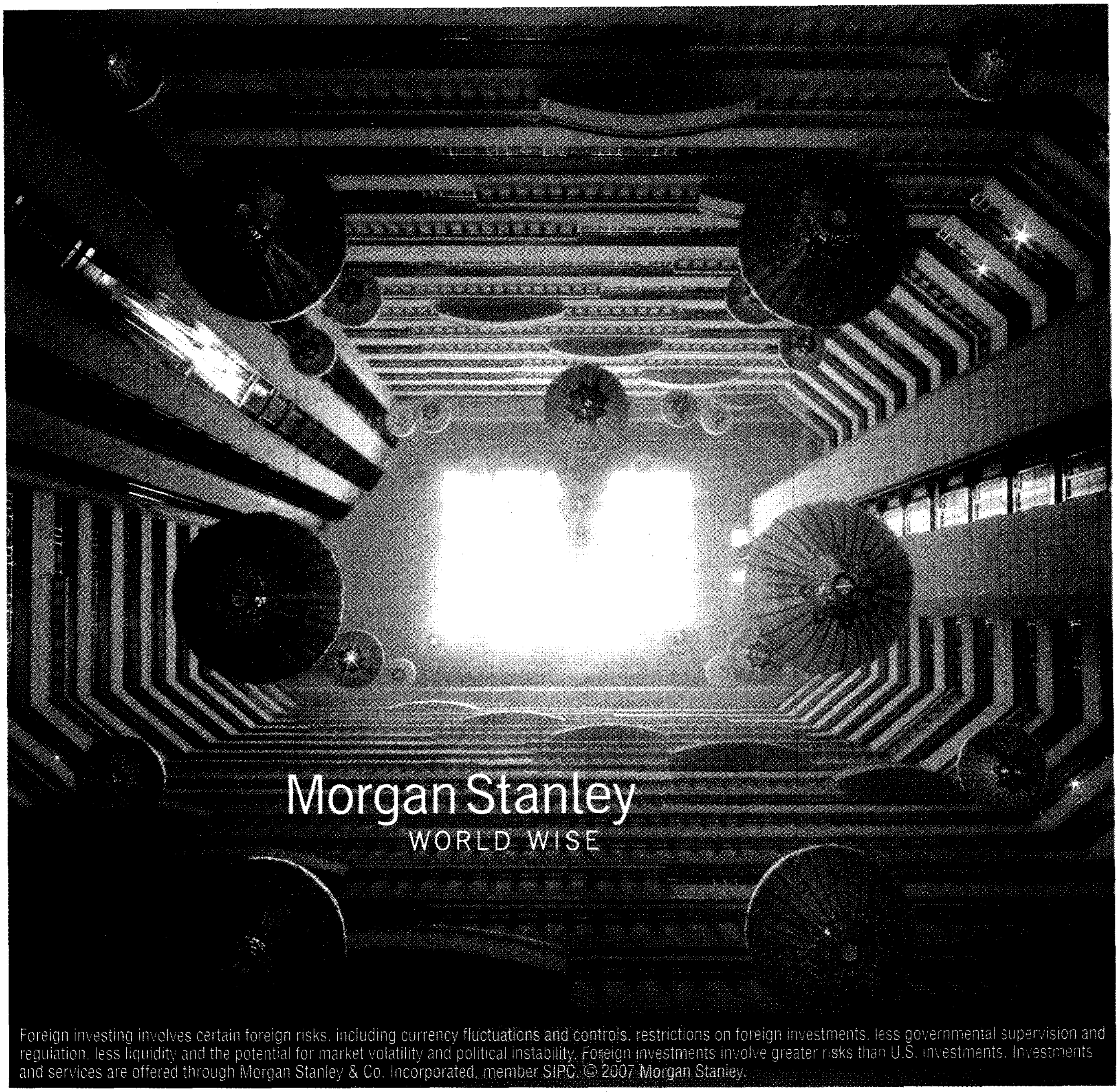
CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

The increasingly short-term nature of C.E.O.s' jobs, along with the pressure on them to deliver results quickly, doesn't help matters. The average C.E.O.'s tenure today is just six years, long enough to see the benefits of downsizing (like a lower payroll) but not long enough to suffer costs that may appear in the long term. And the lack of job security means executives have to worry more about what shareholders and analysts are saying. While the market as a whole may be skeptical about downsizing, many powerful people on the Street aren't. Before Citigroup announced its layoffs, for instance, it had to contend with a chorus of critics—including its biggest shareholder—insisting that the company was a bloated giant that needed to get its costs under control. Even if the job cuts didn't move the stock price, they were at least a sign to those critics that the company was listening.

On top of all this, a C.E.O. is likely to look to layoffs as a solution because that's what almost everyone else does, too. The word "downsizing" wasn't even invented until the mid-seventies. The waves of layoffs that began at the end of that decade and peaked after the recession of 1990-91 were largely a response to crisis on the part of manufacturing companies swamped by foreign competitors and stuck with excess capacity. More recently, however, downsizing has become less a response to disaster than a default business strategy, part of an inexorable drive to cut costs. That's why Circuit City can proclaim, "Our associates are our greatest assets," and then lay off veteran salespeople because they earn fifty-one cents an hour too much.

There's nothing wrong with cost-cutting, and in any dynamic economy layoffs will be necessary. The problem is that too many companies today define workers solely in terms of how much they cost, rather than how much value they create. This is understandable: after downsizing, it's easier to measure a lower wage bill than it is to see the business the company isn't getting because it has too few salesmen, or the new products it isn't inventing because its R. & D. staff is too small. These lost opportunities may be hard to measure, but over time they can have a huge impact on corporate performance. Judging from its reaction to layoff announcements, the stock market understands this. It's time executives did, too.

—*James Surowiecki*



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LIFE AND LETTERS

THE IMPERSONATOR

Peter Morgan fills in the gaps of history.

BY JOHN LAHR

"The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it," Oscar Wilde said. The British screenwriter and playwright Peter Morgan—responsible for the 2006 movie "The Queen" and for the play "Frost/Nixon," now on Broadway (at the Bernard B. Jacobs)—agrees. His stories, he says, "take defining moments in recent history and allow drama to explore areas that have perhaps been neglected." These areas have included the royal family's response to the death of Diana ("The Queen"), the rise of the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin (the 2006 film "The Last King of Scotland," which Morgan co-wrote with Jeremy Brock), the power-sharing agreement made between Prime Minister-to-be Tony Blair and his future Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown (in a 2003 Channel 4 TV movie called "The Deal"), the prison reformer Lord Longford's attempt to win a pardon for the child-murderer Myra Hindley (in another Channel 4 TV movie, titled "Longford," and recently aired on HBO), and the combative interview between former President Richard Nixon and the British talk-show pundit David Frost ("Frost/Nixon").

Over the past five years, Morgan, who is forty-four, has become a brand name. He owns the franchise on a certain kind of scrupulously researched and astutely observed investigation into the emotional ructions behind contemporary events—neither documentary nor fiction but an imaginative amalgam of the two. Since his Academy Award nomination for "The Queen," which has grossed more than a hundred million dollars, Morgan has been inundated with scripts. "None of them interest me, because they're all fact-based," he told me. What interests him is narratives in which real public figures are thrown into unlikely relationships. His dramas turn on what he has called "this odd collection of pas de deux—dances between very different kinds of people." "I want to go to all the un-minuted places—bedrooms, Land-Rovers, private audiences," he told ABC News this year. To me he said, "I couldn't begin to write unless I could see heartbreak or human connection. I have a great deal of compassion for those in public life and what we have done to them."

As a storyteller, Morgan is drawn to volatile, ambitious antagonists. ("Ambition interests me because it's such a surefire indicator of damage," he said.) In "The Deal," a drama, directed by Stephen Frears—who also directed "The Queen"—about Tony Blair's pivotal meeting with Gordon Brown, in 1994 at a North London restaurant, where they decided on the future of the Labour Party leadership (a meeting whose ramifications are still playing out in British politics), Morgan hit on a rich, intellectually challenging seam of psychological and political combat. "I actually wrote about a sort of fratricide," he said. "That's what interested me: friendship and betrayal." In one scene, in which the up-and-coming politicians are walking out of the House of Commons, competition and exposition play off each other deftly, as the passive-aggressive Blair teases the saturnine front-runner Brown, asking him if his reticence is a "specifically Scottish trait":

GORDON: You ask this, as a Scot yourself, of course.

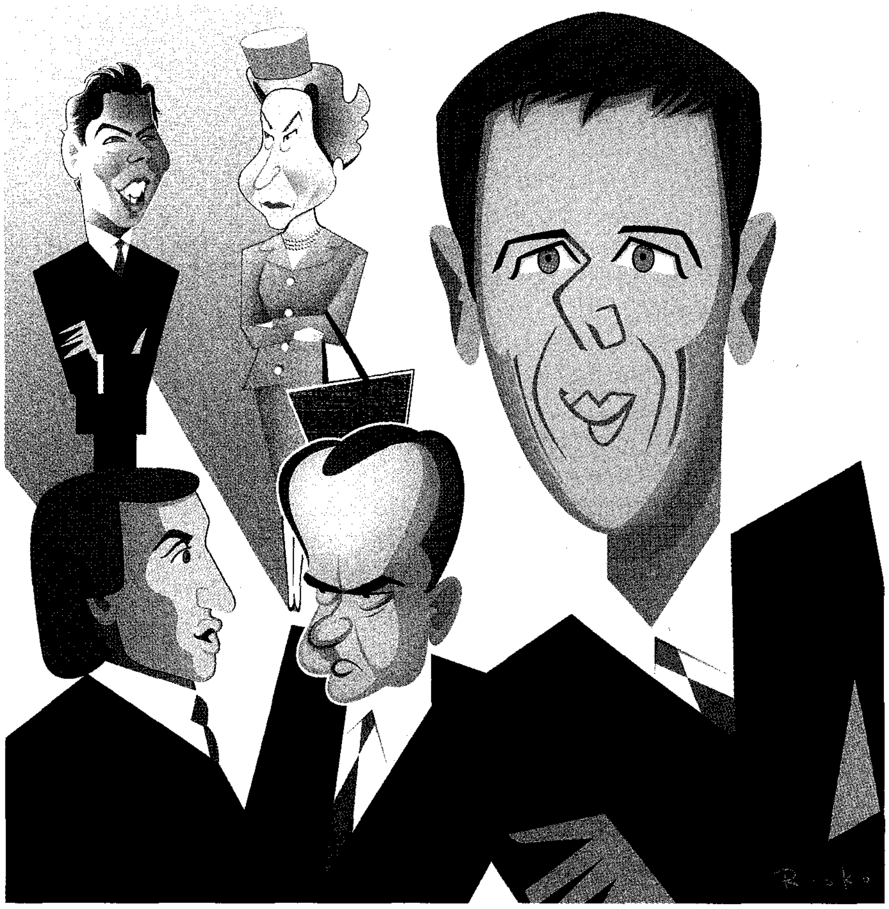
TONY: You may mock, but I am a Scot.

GORDON: As well as being black, and working-class.

TONY: I was born in Scotland.

GORDON: Being born in a stable doesn't make you a horse.

The chemistry of opposition makes terrific drama. Morgan insists on this point. "They tried to get me to write about the Queen without Tony Blair," he recalled of his producers on "The Queen." "What happened after Diana's death was quite interesting, and it was about Blair and the Queen. They said, 'For God's sake, don't go anywhere near Blair.' So I started trying to write it without Blair in it. I just couldn't. It wasn't interesting to me. I called Stephen up and said, 'The only way this is interesting is with Blair and the Queen in conflict—it's sort of mothers and sons, two different generations in two different worlds, two different Englands, two different languages.' And he got that immediately." Frears said, "His friends in London are quite grand, so he's writing precisely about things that he's observed." (Morgan married Lila Schwarzenberg, an Austrian, in 1997; they and their four children live in London.)



Morgan says he has *"compassion for those in public life and what we've done to them."*

ROBERT RISKO

Much of Morgan's storytelling is anchored in warring dualities. "The Last King of Scotland," in which a young, adventurous Scot becomes the personal physician to Idi Amin and unwittingly gets caught up in the tyranny of his revolution, explores a kind of father-son conflict; in "Longford," the vanity of a would-be saint is tested by the manipulative projections of one of the nation's most infamous sinners. ("If you'd been there that night," Hindley tells Longford in a trenchant exchange at the finale, "on the moors . . . when we did the first one, you'd know that evil can be a spiritual experience, too.") In a sense, "Frost/Nixon" (which Morgan has adapted for a movie, to be directed by Ron Howard) is a perfect case study of Morgan's style. "In the end, it's just two people and words," Morgan said. In Nixon and Frost, he found two explosive, contradictory protagonists, both on the decline, both looking for a way to redeem their names, one famously repressed and the other famously indulgent. "It's like nitrogen and glycerin," Morgan said. "Apart, they are completely harmless chemicals; together, it's a wonderful cocktail."

Structure is what turns Morgan's unlikely pairings into the combustible material we see onstage and onscreen. "History gives him an outline," Andy Harries, the head of drama and film production for Britain's ITV, and the producer of "The Queen," said. "He's brilliant at accessing material and finding a plumb line through it." Harries added, "He's the best first-drafter I've ever read. If he gets it in the first draft, he's got the movie. If he doesn't get it in the first draft, he sort of never will." (Morgan wrote the first draft of "The Queen" in three weeks.) "I do have an innate understanding of where a story should or shouldn't go, in a way that I don't think can be taught," Morgan said. He has, he said, "an almost autistic ability to see a shape in a story": "So, in other words, 'The Queen' right from the get-go was: audience scene-Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-audience scene. Blair-Brown was: starts at the end, goes back, tells the story for two-thirds, then goes back. I lock onto a structure almost like an infant looking at colors and shapes. Once I've got that, I'll never deviate from it. There are many, many things in my work that need redoing—never the structure."

Part of the trick, as Morgan understands it, is to move quickly "from levity to seriousness." In this, he is well served by a sharp sense of humor. "He's the greatest standup that never was," Harries said. "When I first met Peter, I just wanted to put him onstage. He was Jerry Seinfeld. He was savage, and occasionally overstepped the mark; he lost a few friends along the way." Morgan is a good mimic; he often gets inside his characters' minds by aping the rhythms of their speech. For "Longford," he watched tapes of Longford's television appearances until he got "a genetic print of the way he spoke." For his current commission, again with Frears, a TV movie about the Derby County soccer coach Brian Clough and his takeover of Leeds United, the hated rival club, Morgan learned to write "long speeches in a sort of working-class Middlesbrough vernacular." His ear for idiomatic speech and the comedy of its weasel words is enhanced by the fact that his characters rarely tell jokes as such; their humor is between the lines. "The Queen" opens with Elizabeth II, played by Helen Mirren, having her portrait painted by an artist who admits to having cast his vote for the Conservatives:

> ELIZABETH: I envy you being able to vote. (*A beat*) Not the actual ticking of the box, although it would, oh, it would be nice to experience that ONCE. (*A beat*) But the sheer joy of being partial.

It's part of Morgan's mischievous power

that the viewer can never tell if he's being supportive or subversive.

Morgan's collages of fact and fiction, with their dramatic nuances and subtle reversals, lend surprising tension to otherwise familiar events; all of his stories play like thrillers. Part of the illusion of plausibility comes from a shrewd selection of detail: Nixon's appreciation of Frost's Italian-leather loafers sheds light on his capacity for envy; the bagpipes that wake the Queen each morning announce both the day and the ritual that defines her life and which she defines ("It's her morning alarm call, and it's the way she wakes up wherever she is—anywhere in the world," the stage directions read). Frears said, "One thing people would say about the Blair-Brown film was ‘Well, after a few minutes I stopped thinking they were actors.' People would describe that quite early suspension of disbelief. His writing leads you to accuracy." He added, "It was the freshest piece of writing I'd come across—not like anything else. It's so pertinent." The success of Morgan's narrative style can be measured by the number of imitators he has spawned; within the past few months, British film companies and television channels have announced projects dealing with Margaret Thatcher, the young Queen Victoria, and Buckingham Palace. "As much as I would like to carry on writing like this, I fear I can't," Morgan said.

BEAGLE OR SOMETHING

The composer's name was Beagle or something,
one of those Brits who make the world wistful
with chorales and canticles and this piece,
a tone poem or what-have-you,
chimes and strings aswirl, dangerous for one
whose eyelids and sockets have been rashing from tears.
The music occupied the car where
I had parked and then sat, staring at
a tree, a smallish maple,
fire-gold and half-undone by the wind,
shaking in itself,
shocking blue morning sky behind, and also
the trucks and telephone wires and dogs
and children late to school along Orange Street, but
it was the tree that caused an uproar,
it was the tree that shook and shed,
aureate as a shaken soul, I remembered
I was supposed to have one—for convenience

I placed it in my chest, the heart being away,
and now it seems the soul has lodged there, shaking,
golden-orange, half-spent but clanging
truer than Beagle music or my forehead pressed
hard on the steering wheel in petition for release.

—April Bernard

Although Morgan likes to scrutinize the contradictory traits of his characters, he studiously refuses to examine his own nature. "I don't want to know what swamp of toxicity and lunacy lies beneath the surface," he has said. As a result, his metabolism is, according to Harries, "quite charged." Behind the urbanity and wit, Frears said, Morgan is "a very emotional man," with "tremendous extremes of cheerfulness and depression." He added, "It can cause havoc."

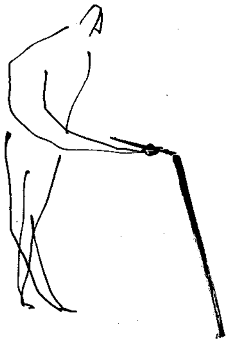
Morgan, who calls himself "a complicated mongrel," was born in England, the son of Arthur Morgenthau, a German Jewish refugee, and Inga Bojcek, a Polish Catholic refugee (one had fled the Nazis, the other the Russians). Morgan, who was nicknamed Fritz at school, grew up speaking German at home. When he was nine, his father died, at the age of fifty-nine. "It is devastating, losing a parent," he told the London *Evening Standard* last year. "I don't really know what the effect is, but I suppose people might call me an ambitious man, and I'd say that an ambitious man is a damaged man." Certainly, even before his father's death, Morgan had been set on the educational ladder of British upper-middle-class success: he attended St. Paul's Preparatory School and, thanks to the munificence of a godparent, Downside, a Catholic boarding school in Somerset, which he hated and where he developed what he has called "the muscles of disobedience." He said, "I was taken out of a very Jewish meritocratic school—St. Paul's—and sent to this boarding school where I came up against landed Englishness for the first time in my life. It wasn't my people. I just didn't get it." After he'd been there for about three and a half years, Morgan recalls, he woke up one day and thought, This is not a sentence. I don't have to do this. He phoned his mother and told her he'd be home in three hours. Then, leaving all his belongings behind, he walked out of school and never returned. The decision, according to Morgan, was "completely the making of me." In order to pay for a six-form college—a crammer, in effect—which he needed to attend before university, he worked nights doing data entry at a bank. When it came time to choose a university, although he had the exam results for Oxford or Cambridge, he decided on Leeds University, where he turned out to be, by and large, the only Southerner and the only public-school boy in his year. He was thrown in with politicized people who, he has said, "tore me to pieces." For a naïve, sheltered middle-class kid, the experience was transformative.

By the time he graduated, with a degree in fine arts, in 1984, Morgan had discovered theatre and won some success as a student actor. After a bout of stage-fright in a production of "Love's Labour's Lost," however, he gave up any hope of a professional career on the stage. Instead, with Mark Wadlow, a university friend and collaborator (who is now a senior writer on the ITV series "Coronation Street"), he channelled his theatrical energy into directing shows and writing scripts. In the mid-eighties, Wadlow and Morgan took a play, “Gross,” based on Wadlow’s summer job at a call center, to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. They attracted the attention of a producer of corporate training films, who provided a back-door entrée into filmmaking. By the time he was twenty-three, he and Wadlow were doing rewrites on John Schlesinger’s “Madame Sousatzka,” about which Pauline Kael said, “It should be projected on the wall while you have a polite lunch at the Russian Tea Room—the wall behind you.” Morgan told the London *Observer*, “We were incredibly cheap and totally exploited for six months for about five grand. . . . Then five or six years of penury followed, where we were still writing . . . any kind of scripts. It’s like when you turn on the tap and rust comes out. It takes a while until it’s clear. You have to write the bad ideas out.”

In 1990, Morgan and Wadlow wrote “Dear Rosie,” an Academy Award-nominated eleven-minute film about a struggling female novelist, whose agent, more impressed by her weight-loss program than by her prose, turns her into a diva of diet books. As a metaphor for commercial compromise, it seemed to reflect the frustrations that Morgan was experiencing. “Until five years ago, he wasn’t an A-list writer,” Harries said. “He was pitching a lot of ideas that weren’t intrinsically him. He could pitch a good romantic comedy. He’s much smarter than that, and actually he’s not fundamentally a comedy writer.” The turning point was “The Deal.” “It was radically different,” Harries said. “He’d found himself. He knew what he wanted to write, and, as much as anything, he knew what he didn’t want to write.” The person who, according to Morgan, made the difference to his career was Frears. “Stephen’s where I got my confidence,” he said. “He chose to do my work. There’s not a charitable bone in his body, so clearly it must have been out of self-interest.”

Frears also got Morgan to focus his ideas and to polish his exchanges to a bright specificity. (“I just ask questions,” Frears said. “You tease it out that way.”) Sometimes in production, however, things between the two men can get fiery. “He’s a big baby,” Frears said. “He just has to be dealt with all the time.” Frears cited as an example the helicopter shot in “The Queen” of deer-stalking on the Scottish moors. “I’ve never actually been deer-stalking,” Frears said. “I made him come up to Scotland and take me out onto the moors, with all the people, and I said, ‘Now explain to me what happens. Where’s the deer? Where are the people? How close are they?’ I got him to go through it in detail.” Frears continued, “The grumbling that went on! ‘Why am I being dragged up to Scotland?’ He drives you senseless with rage half the time.” Nonetheless, when, recently, Morgan was asked by Sony to direct his own movie, he replied, “As long as Steve Frears is around, why on earth would I want to direct?”

Morgan not only owes his best films to Frears; he also inadvertently owes him his first play. According to Frears, Morgan didn’t want to rush the writing of “The Queen.” “Take as long as you like,” Frears told him. Given carte blanche, Morgan wrote perhaps too quickly. He was done a week later. The day before he handed in the script, Frears agreed to direct the musical “Mrs. Henderson Presents,” with Dame Judi Dench, which meant that “The Queen” would be postponed for more than a year. “Stephen pissed me off so much by doing ‘Mrs. Henderson Presents’ before ‘The Queen’ that I started writing ‘Frost/Nixon’ as a sort of act of skydiving. The only way I was ever going to be able to be civil to Stephen again was if I used that moment to do something that I would never have done otherwise,” Morgan said. He’d had the idea for “Frost/Nixon” for a long time. “I just didn’t have the confidence to write,” he said. Now, emboldened by his anger, “I opened the door to the airplane and jumped out. I thought, Well, I just hope I’ve got a parachute.”



Morgan’s preferred method is to write first and research later, passing the first draft to people in the know with the question “Is this believable?” “Frost/Nixon” required a reversal of procedure. In 1977, David Frost, in an act of entrepreneurial chutzpah intended to bolster his flagging career as a celebrity-talk-show host, coaxed the disgraced former President into six hours of interviews, to be aired in four segments. Frost wanted to get Nixon to admit his culpability in Watergate and to apologize—something he had never done. Nixon, from his isolation in San Clemente, California, saw it as a chance to reënter the public arena, as well as to make a big paycheck. (He negotiated a deal in which he would receive six hundred thousand dollars and twenty per cent of the profits from the broadcasts.) The Nixon-Frost exchanges were the television version of Muhammad Ali’s rope-a-dope against George Foreman: Nixon outpointed his opponent, only to be somehow blindsided at the last minute. Morgan’s interest in the story was not political. Morgan saw in Frost’s and Nixon’s conflicting personalities the prospect of gladiatorial combat—a fight in which there could be only one winner. “If you watch the interviews in context, Nixon is momentarily wounded, but he quickly gathers himself—he gives nothing back,” Morgan said. “Now we’re getting into the laws of dramatic art. There are internal imperatives and logics to narrative. I could just as easily have written the piece—and found substance to support it—to substantiate the idea that Frost didn’t get Nixon, that Nixon half threw it, in order for these interviews to sell.” Instead, although the play astutely synthesizes the actual events, it is, by Morgan’s own admission, “a bouquet to Frost.” Morgan said, “When I met Frost, I didn’t connect with him. He didn’t understand what I was trying to do. I thought, The less I see of this man the better, because I wanted to write him dispassionately and, to some degree, respectfully.”

Before beginning to write, Morgan spent about three weeks in Washington researching the project. He even hired a tutor on American politics. He interviewed all the secondary players in the drama—the sidemen who prepared Frost to go into the ring. Although Morgan regrets not having built up the characters of Frost’s high-powered advisers John Birt and Bob Zelnick—lacunae in the play which the film will rectify—he got lucky with the third member of Frost’s team, the writer James Reston, Jr. “One has to bow to the god of dramatis,” Morgan said. “I needed one angry American liberal and one indignant militaristic Republican." In Reston, whom Morgan wrote into the play as the embodiment of the American protest against Nixon, he found an adamant and eloquent liberal with an unpublished manuscript about the event in his personal files. (Reston's "The Conviction of Richard Nixon" is being published to coincide with the play's run in New York.) Although Morgan refers to Reston's manuscript as "quite unreadable," he was able to spin much of its incidental detail into dramatic gold. He acknowledged its usefulness in his personal inscription of the published play to Reston—"collaborator, fellow conspirator, colleague, and friend . . . without whom this would never, could never have come into being."

Morgan is an opinionated man who relishes tweaking received opinion. His dramas rambunctiously challenge the public to get beyond what he has called "the default position of hating," which is a refusal to think. ("Politically, he teeters between the extreme right and the extreme left," Frears says. "He's very hard to nail down.") "Frost/Nixon" is an entertaining theatrical example of his maverick light touch. "The conviction and crucifixion of Richard Nixon doesn't interest me," Morgan said. What interests him, as he told the *Evening Standard* last year, is "to represent people who are hated, although in the case of Nixon and Amin that hatred is entirely justified." The greatest traps are the ones we lay for ourselves; Morgan seems to have a talent for winkling out self-destructive contradictions in the historical figures he portrays. The Queen is master of her public role and inept at her private one; Gordon Brown is a remarkable public servant who can't relate well to the public; and, perhaps most tragic of all, Nixon is intelligent enough to acknowledge his limitations but not smart enough to do anything about them. The historical event of the interviews, as Morgan sees it, brings together "two lonely, disconnected men clamoring for the limelight to complete themselves somehow"; the encounter raises powerful psychological undercurrents. "Clumsy, socially inadequate as Richard Nixon is, prone to uncontrollable, incontinent perspiration, how can he not stare with a sort of fury and envy and erotic fascination at a young, confident, blue-eyed, unperspiring, womanizing guy?" Morgan said. The Nixon he brings onstage is a monument of self-loathing and self-consciousness, a man whose practiced bonhomie only underscores his discomfort in his own skin. ("Most smiles are infectious. Make you want to smile back. Nixon's has the opposite effect," the stage direction reads on the play's first page.) "I could write about awkwardness—all that kind of stuff—because I feel it," Morgan said.

The sinew of Morgan's dialogue and the vivid emotional arcs he builds for his characters are a gift to first-rate actors—Helen Mirren, Forest Whitaker, Jim Broadbent, Samantha Morton, to name a few. Now Frank Langella can be added to that list. As Nixon, Langella, reprising his London triumph, is magnificent. In life, Langella is known to be a passionate, imposing, voluble character; onstage, his stooped, jowly, repressed but forceful Nixon is a piquant piece of theatrical transformation. From the moment Langella's Nixon enters—the occasion is a TV broadcast in the Oval Office, on August 8, 1974, that turns out to be Nixon's resignation speech to the nation—he is shrouded in solitude, a stranger to himself. Langella has given Nixon's speech patterns as much inspired scrutiny as his posture. Langella's raspy low voice—a sound with no smile in it—catches Nixon's grave, evasive music. The tone, with its combination of authority and banality, echoes some kind of internal emptiness. ("Pleasant evening last night?" Nixon asks Frost, as they're about to tape the segment on Vietnam. "Did you do any fornicating?") Nonetheless, Nixon's hollow idiom can be hypnotic, distracting even Nixon himself from the implications of what he's saying. For instance, during his legalistic wittering about Watergate, Frost interrupts, "Are you really saying that there are certain situations where the President can decide whether it's in the best interest of the nation and do something illegal?" Nixon answers, "I'm saying that when the President does it that means it's not illegal." The line, for obvious sorry reasons in the republic, gets a huge laugh.

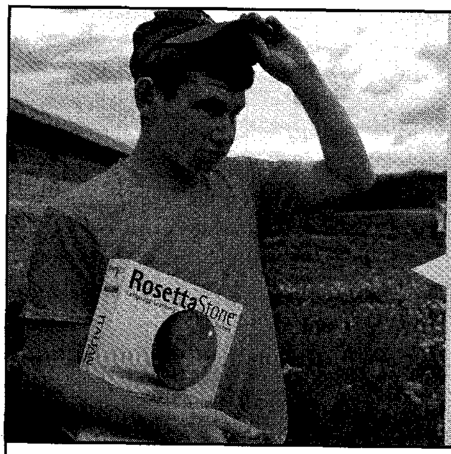
David Frost is played by Michael Sheen, who, in the past few years, seems to have found nearly permanent employment in Morgan's œuvre. He was a memorable Tony Blair in both "The Deal" and "The Queen"; as soon as he has finished his limited engagement in "Frost/Nixon," he will move on to portray the soccer supremo Brian Clough in the next Morgan-Frears collaboration. Here his warmth, humor, and alertness play well against the aloof and lugubrious Nixon. Where Nixon can never, even at his best moments, give off a whiff of ease, Sheen's Frost exudes it; Sheen manages to suggest both Frost's manic effervescence and his dandy's desire to shine. An expert mimic—he has also played the loud and lewd high-camp king of the British "Carry On" comedies, Kenneth Williams—Sheen has a great deal of fun with Frost's speech mannerisms, especially his alliterative flourishes. The play recounts Frost's retort to the rivalrous Mike Wallace about his upcoming interview with Nixon: "I'm hoping it will be a cascade of candor." But straight talk, when it comes, is an imagined drunken late-night call from Nixon before the taping of the legendary Watergate segment. "That's our tragedy isn't it, Mr. Frost?" Nixon says. "No matter how high we get, they still look down on us." He has sussed the same canker of ambition and revenge in his British adversary, of whom it was once said that "he rose without a trace." He goes on:

> No matter how many awards—or how many column inches are written about you—or how high the elected office is for me—it still isn't enough, am I right? We still feel like the little man? The loser they told us we were? A hundred times. The smart-asses at college. The high-ups. The well-born. The people whose respect we really wanted. Really craved. And isn't that why we work so hard now? Why we fight for every inch?

If Nixon intuits the bond of competition between them, Frost senses in Nixon the moral exhaustion of a life dedicated to winning at all cost. When Nixon's aide, against all the rules of engagement, interrupts the interview just at the point where Nixon is about to admit culpability—a moment of terrific suspense, which is historically accurate—Frost is curiously unruffled. As Morgan would have it, Nixon's confession of guilt is a sort of political suicide, a redemptive gesture, and Nixon has chosen Frost to assist him. "He wants me to do this. To finish him off," Frost says before the interview resumes, and he does just that. "He wants the wilderness." The fact that this powerful moment is imagined doesn't distract from its emotional truth. In lifting Nixon out of the odium in which history has preserved him, Morgan makes us feel Nixon's tortured humanity—an intimation of genuine tragedy.

The production has not travelled smoothly from the intimate Donmar Warehouse, where the audience was never more than thirty feet from the intellectual jousting, to the cavernous Broadway proscenium of the Jacobs; something essential in its chemistry has changed. The dialogue is still trenchant, the main performances are still vivacious and crowd-pleasing, but, in Michael Grandage's transfer, "Frost/Nixon" has become bombastic. The characters broadcast themselves across the footlights, which robs the evening of its illusion of intimacy. The monumentality of the space—the mahogany-stained-pine surround, the thirty-six TV screens on the upstage wall, on which the "televised" debates and the locales can be seen—swallows up the actors, who are forced to do a lot of spinning and pacing and crossing, to provide a bogus dynamism that is underlined by the smash cuts of jarring sound. The effect maximizes the limitations of the play's theatrical shorthand rather than its drama.

Although the play allows Nixon a contrition and Frost a victory that don't appear in the six hours of interviews, Morgan, by dramatizing the making of the interviews, traps a fascinating larger point about the media and democracy. He demonstrates that everything that rises in America converges on television, where it is necessarily theatricalized and trivialized. In the play's coda, after Nixon's ravaged face has been maneuvered by Frost into a sort of onscreen confession—the money shot for Frost's show, which, according to the play, "attracted the largest audience for a news program in the history of American television"—Reston (Stephen Kunken) is bemused by the spectacle of his elated cohort John Birt, who has stripped and run into the sea to celebrate. "That was before I understood the reductive power of the closeup," Reston says. He goes on, "The first and greatest sin of television is that it simplifies. Diminishes. Great, complex ideas, tranches of time, whole careers, become reduced to a single snapshot." Television is by its nature a fictionalization of history; it personifies history as fable agreed upon. Morgan, the storyteller who plays his own game of three-card monte with the actual, appreciates the irony. "Frost has now repackaged the whole thing," Morgan told me. "He's reduced the interviews to the Watergate interview—cut out all the others." He added, "It's now just the reëdited Watergate interview, which makes it look like he gets him." ♦



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SHOUTS & MURMURS

FOUR SHORT CRUSHES

BY PAUL SIMMS

Well, well, well.

Just look at you, walking into this dreary bar and lighting the place up like the noonday sun at midnight, twirling a lock of your long auburn hair pensively as you search the room—for what?

For a soul mate, perhaps?

(I know, I know—I hate that phrase, too. Maybe that will end up being one of those things we both hate.) Maybe a few weeks from now, lying in your bed on a Sunday morning, I'll ask you, "What's your least favorite word or phrase?," and you'll say, " 'Soul mate,' " and I'll laugh till you say, "What? Tell me!," and I'll tell you how I knew that from the moment I first laid eyes on you, and then we'll have sex again.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. You haven't even noticed me yet. That's O.K. I can wait.

Maybe when your gaze settles on me, and we lock eyes in that mutual Hitchcockian tunnel-vision effect where the camera is, like, pushing in at the same time it zooms out, or however they do that, you'll come sit down next to me and we'll—

Now you've spotted the friends you came to meet. They look like good friends.

Maybe they'll be my friends, too.

Our friends.

Your eyes just came to life like emeralds lit by subterranean torches, and as you move across the room toward your friends you shriek at them, "What the fuck is up, yo?," in a voice so piercing that the entire bar goes silent for a moment, and I have to check my glasses to make sure the lenses didn't crack. You continue to bellow your every utterance (including the lines "Jägermeister is the bomb, dawg!" and "Just 'cause I'm a white girl don't mean I don't got some serious junk in the trunk!" and "Random! Random! Random!"), and the bartender leans in and whispers something to his bar back, and they look at you and laugh.

You must be a regular here.

(Duration of crush: seventeen seconds.)

Oh my. What have we here? A rainy night in the city has cleared the sidewalks of all but the most intrepid pedestrians, and those who didn't brave the elements have no idea what they're missing.

Because there you are, gliding along on your bicycle, just a few feet ahead of me.

You're obviously not one of those tedious hard-core cycling enthusiasts—no skin-tight black spandex for you. No, just a simple white T-shirt (soaked through to the skin, clinging to the small of your back) and a long blond ponytail, whipping back and forth like the tail of a cartoon pony, as those long legs of yours pump the pedals and you raise your face to the sky, letting the raindrops freckle your cheeks with sweet diamonds of moisture.

Dare I try to catch up to you? I'm on foot, carrying a bunch of shopping bags, but you've paused at a red light, and—what the heck? I don't know what I'll say to you, but even the clumsiest of introductions on these glistening nighttime streets will give us a romantic how-we-met anecdote that we'll love telling for years to come.

Caught you! Here I am!

And there you are. I see now that you're a dude. My mistake. It was the ponytail that threw me off.

(Duration of crush: thirty-three seconds.)

Another restaurant dinner with my boring girlfriend, another lecture about how I never really listen to whatever she's yammering on about.

But how can I listen—how could anyone?—when across the room, alone at a table, reading the newspaper and nursing a glass of white wine, is a silent confection like you?

You, with your jet-black hair (like a latter-day Veronica from "Archie") and your skin so pale that the bubble-gummy pinkness of your pouty lips seems almost obscene, especially when you scrunch them up the way you do every time you lick your forefinger and turn the page.

And I know you see me, too. Your first glance betrayed a glimmer of recognition—as if you knew me but couldn't remember from where—followed by puzzlement, your eyes entreating me to silently remind you, which I couldn't do at the time because my current girlfriend was staring across the table at me, apparently waiting for my answer to some kind of relationship question that I thought was rhetorical.

And so it goes. For an eternity, it seems—through the entire meal, until I watch you ask for the check, and pay it, and get up to walk out of the restaurant, and my life, forever.

But what's this? You're crossing the room toward me? So brazen—just as I knew you'd be. Are you going to surreptitiously slip me your number, written on a sugar packet, perhaps dropping it in my pocket as you fake-jostle me, like a spy handing off microfilm?

My heart beats like underwater thunder in my ears, until you tap my girlfriend on the shoulder, and she sees you and says, "Hey!," and you say, "I thought that was you!," and I realize that you are one of my girlfriend's college roommates.

After you leave, my girlfriend tells me a hilarious story about how one time in college some guy broke up with you, so you found some photos of him nude with the word "Patriarchy" written on his chest in Magic Marker which you took for an art class, and you sent them to his parents and then posted them on your blog, where you apparently like to write incredibly detailed confessionals about the asshole guys you always end up dating, and also, while you don't use the guys' real names, everyone knows that the guy you immortalized as Pencil Dick is actually a guy I used to work with.

(Duration of crush: forty-five minutes.)

So silly does my impatience now seem, stuck as I am in the Starbucks line during the morning rush. But that was before I noticed you in line ahead of me.

And now that I've seen you—with your gossamer hair still damp from the shower, with your well-moisturized ankles strapped and buckled into high heels that make you wobble and sway like a young colt just finding her stride, with your scent of lilacs and Dial, and, most of all, with your infectious sense of calmness and serenity, which makes me wish that the world itself would stop spinning, so that gravity would cease and we two could float into the sky and kiss in the clouds, giddy with love and vertigo—

Now you're at the register, and the dreaded moment when we part without meeting rushes toward me like a slow-motion car crash in a dream.

You've been at the register without saying anything for, like, fifteen seconds now, still scanning the menu board with those almond-shaped eyes that would make Nefertiti herself weep with envy.

Seriously, you've been to a Starbucks before, right? I mean, it seems like there are a lot of choices, but most people find a drink they like and stick with it. And order it quickly.

But maybe I've caught you on a day when you've decided to make a fresh start. To make a fresh start, to try a new drink, to walk a different way to work, to finally dump that boyfriend who doesn't appreciate you.

O.K., even if that were the case you could have picked out your new drink while you were waiting in line, right? I mean, come on.

Well, you've won me back, my future Mrs. Me—by turning to me and mouthing, "Sorry," after you finally noticed me tapping my foot, looking at my watch, and exhaling loudly. Sensitivity like that can be neither learned nor taught, and it's a rare thing indeed. The rarest of all possible—

Jesus Christ, you've ordered your drink and paid; do I really have to stand here for another forty-five seconds while you repack your purse, the contents of which you've spilled out on the counter like you're setting up a fucking yard sale or something?

That's right, the bills go in the billfold, the coins go in the little coin purse, the billfold and the coin purse go back in the pocketbook—no, in a side pocket of the pocketbook, which seems to have a clasp whose design incorporates some proprietary technology that you haven't yet mastered.

I think I hate you now.

(Duration of crush: five minutes.) ♦

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Barbara Stanwyck flusters Gary Cooper in a clip from "Ball of Fire."

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

LADY BE GOOD

A centenary season of Barbara Stanwyck.

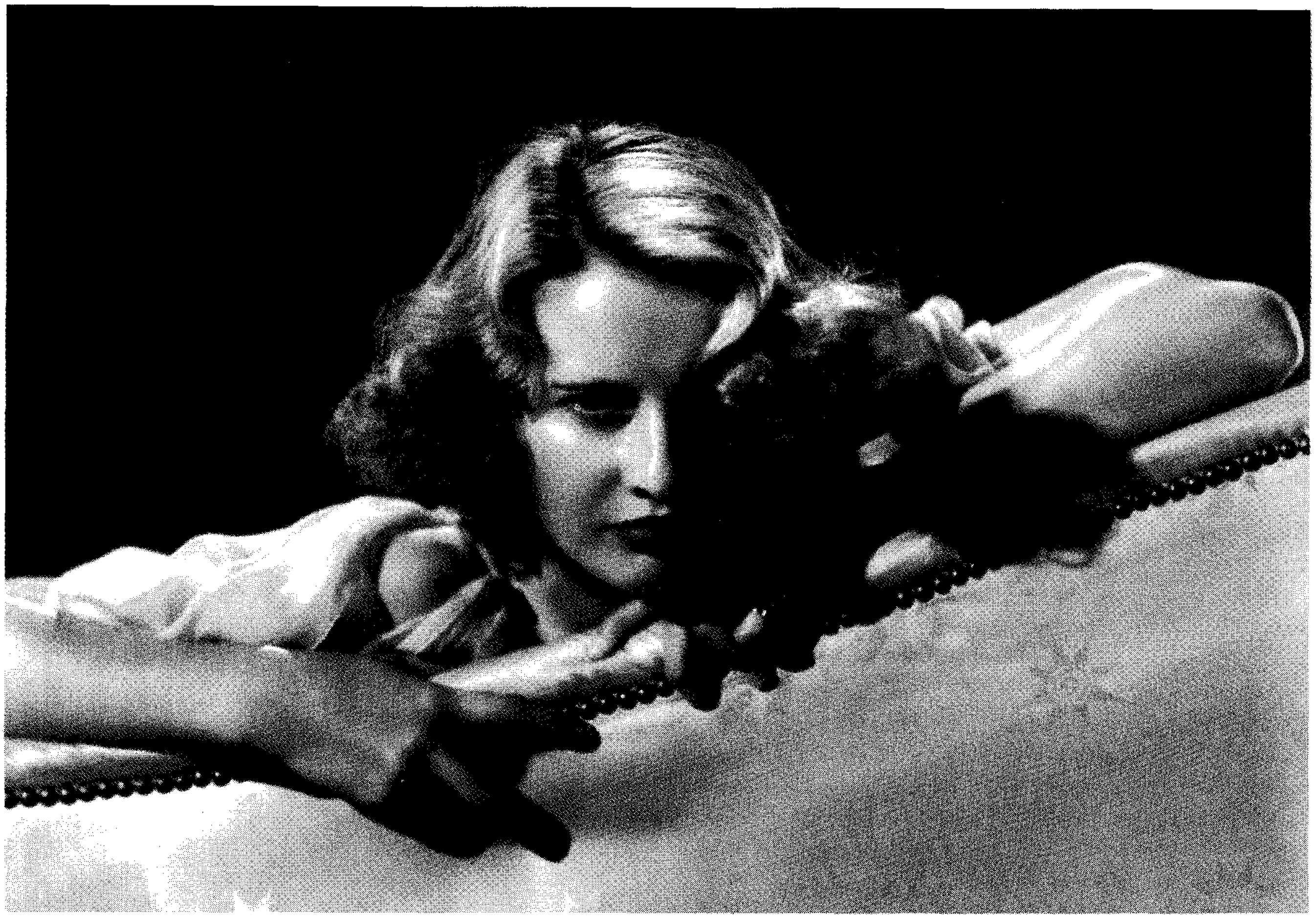
BY ANTHONY LANE

At the Totten Foundation, a scholarly establishment on the Upper West Side, a professor of English bids farewell to a young lady who has been assisting him in his research. "Make no mistake," he says, "I shall regret the absence of your keen mind. Unfortunately, it is inseparable from an extremely disturbing body."

I have always taken these lines to be the high-water mark of American Cartesianism. When we consider the duality of body and mind, we assume that the two can be trusted to get along; that our minds can go about their noble business without being diverted by the physical forms in which they are encased. This theory holds firm up to the exact point at which it bumps into Barbara Stanwyck. It is to her that those regretful words are spoken. The movie is "Ball of Fire"—released in 1941, directed by Howard Hawks, written by Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett, and starring Stanwyck as a night-club chanteuse called Sugarpuss O'Shea. The flustered professor is Bertram Potts (Gary Cooper), who is writing the entry on slang for a new encyclopedia, and who explains to his colleagues that "puss" is an accepted vulgarism for "face." "'Sugarpuss' implies a certain sweetness in her," he says, with a straight puss. Tell that to Descartes and you would blow his mind.

To suggest that Stanwyck never belonged in the first rank of screen beauties would be ungallant but true. To argue, however, that she lacked a ready supply of male victims would be demonstrable nonsense. She had cheekbones of a wicked cut and curve, archable eyebrows, and a nose whose beaky hauteur came in handy when she rose to playing the loftier classes, or, as in "The Lady Eve" (1941), slicing them to shreds. It was a face that launched a thousand inquisitions: the mouth too tight to be rosy, and a voice pitched for slang, all bite and huskiness. When I think of the glory days of American film, at its speediest and most velvety, I think of Barbara Stanwyck.

She was born a hundred years ago, on July 16, 1907. That is cause for fond commemoration, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music is paying homage with a short but concentrated season starting April 25th. The schedule includes "Ball of Fire," which you can see four times on April 28th; "Forty Guns," the crazed Sam Fuller Western from 1957, with its ballsy heroine clad in black, mounted on a white steed, and, at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Stanwyck in 1937. In her films, she faced down the schemings of weak men, got a laugh, and vented no pity.

the age of almost fifty, thrown from a horse and dragged through the dust; and three films with Fred MacMurray—"Remember the Night" (1940), "Double Indemnity" (1944), and "There's Always Tomorrow" (1956). In all, Stanwyck and MacMurray made four movies together. "Once I sent her to jail, once I shot her, once I left her for another woman, and once I sent her over a waterfall," he recalled in 1986. Teamed with Stanwyck, he wore the look of a well-behaved kid who had sneaked out the back door for a nervous moonlit date. She had that effect.

Besides the hundred years since Stanwyck's birth, other statistics demand attention. There are the eighty-three films she made for the big screen. There are the hundred and five episodes, starting in 1965, of the TV series "The Big Valley" in which she starred as Victoria Barkley, thus reinforcing the moral of a lifetime: Don't mess with the matriarch. And there are the four Oscar nominations, none of them crowned with a win, a scandal for which the Academy atoned in 1982 by bestowing an honorary award. Her appearance that night, sequinned and immaculate, suggested that age was simply too awed to wither her, just as America's love for her was always spiced with a pinch of fear. She built and buffed a screen persona whose unending task was to face down the schemings of weak men, to get a laugh for doing so, and to vent no more pity on the plight of others than she did on her own. Her wars with the world did not go unrewarded. Hence the most vital of all her statistics: in 1944, Stanwyck earned four hundred thousand dollars, making her the highest-paid woman in America.

More than sixty years later, and seventeen years after her death, there has been a shift in Stanwyck's reputation. To addicts of old Hollywood, as to pining critics, no actress delivered a more accomplished body of work; to the general public, however, her name is fading into the past. All we have of Stanwyck is a collection of films—but what a collection—and thus the temptation to conflate the woman with her roles is overpowering. Think of a jockey riding multiple mounts in an afternoon and you have some idea of the Stanwyck who had four pictures released in 1941 and again in 1946. Like many stars, she was loaned out on contract from one stable to another, but she made the switches work to her advantage, so that neither Columbia nor Warner Bros., for instance, both of whom worked her hard in the early years, was able to fence her in. In later years, she negotiated short contracts with M-G-M, R.K.O., Paramount, and Twentieth Century Fox. Nobody seemed to own her: not the studios, not her husbands, not Frank Capra or Preston Sturges, not Zeppo Marx, her agent in the thirties. She had self-possession, and that was ownership enough. Samuel Goldwyn tried for three other Sugarpusses—Ginger Rogers, Jean Arthur, and Carole Lombard—before settling on Stanwyck, yet the role now seems inconceivable in the hands of anyone else. That is the way with the brightest stars: as much by accident as by design, they pull toward them the scripts and directors most likely to enrich, even to mythologize, our sense of who they are. We feel as if we have some share in a great public secret. All in all, as Sugarpuss says, "Pretty good getting, for a gal that came up the hard way."

Barbara Stanwyck made her name, and her home, in Southern California, but she was Brooklyn to her toenails, and her real name was Ruby Katherine Stevens. The last of five children, she was two years old when her mother, Catherine, died after stepping off a streetcar, falling, and cracking her head on the curb. Her father, a bricklayer named Byron, waited a couple of weeks, long enough to see his wife interred, then took off to work on the Panama Canal. With that, he vanished from history.

Ruby and her brother Byron were taken up by an older sister, Mildred, who shunted them from one foster family to the next. So tough was that upbringing, and such was Stanwyck's determination not to milk it for sympathy, that, of all the major actresses, she is the hardest to imagine as a child. By the time she arrived in movies, she seemed to know more of the world than anyone around her, enough to make audiences take her on trust. In a studio biography compiled by R.K.O. in 1938, and dug

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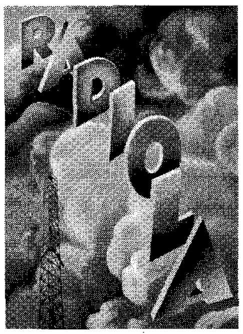

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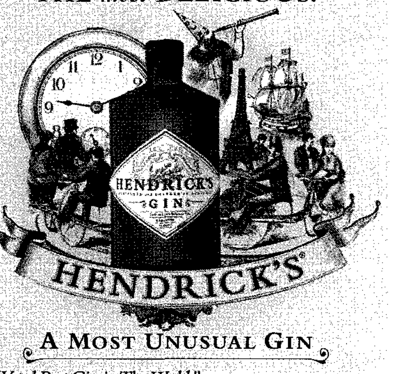

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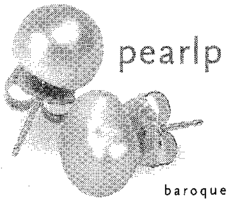

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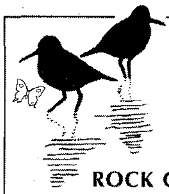

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up by her skilled and tireless biographer Axel Madsen for his 1994 book, Stanwyck said, "Growing up in one foster home after another didn't give me any edge on the other kids or any excuse for whining, protesting, demanding. Besides, why whine?" As if submitting a job application for the business of film noir, she described the abandoned breed to which she belonged as "alert, precocious, and savage," and their situation as "hapless, maybe, but not helpless, not hopeless." That predicament left her perfectly placed, during the years of the Depression, to sell her wares—her portraits of women who know the look and smell of misfortune, and who have taught themselves to fend off its attacks. You can't help wondering, if Little Orphan Ruby hadn't bloomed into Barbara Stanwyck, what she would have become? President Stevens, the first of her sex? Or the only Mob boss to wear a skirt?

Mildred was a showgirl, and Ruby liked to follow in her slipstream, picking up the moves. She left school at thirteen, and two years later she was earning her keep in the chorus at the Strand Roof, high above Times Square, shifting soon to a production of "Ziegfeld Follies" at the New Amsterdam, and from there to "Keep Kool" at the Morosco, where she was billed as one of the Keep Kool Cuties. One wonders how she felt in 1952, crossing swords with Robert Ryan in Fritz Lang's "Clash by Night":

> "Were you ever a showgirl?"
> "Ye gods, no."
> "You look like you could be."

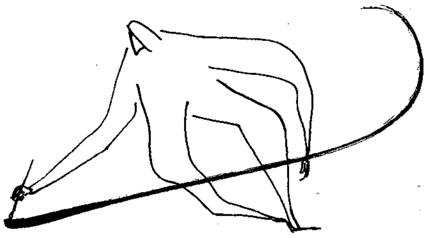
Fans of Stanwyck films might not think of her as a hoofer, but they would be the first to admit that she had the best and most brazen walk in Hollywood, changing gear from march to sidle as the mood required—those nights at the Morosco could be viewed as one long limbering-up. Tucked into her résumé are a number of movies in which the old, high-stepping talents were dusted off: "Ten Cents a Dance" (1931) and "Lady of Burlesque" (1943), which boasts not only my favorite screen credit of all time ("Based on the novel 'G-String Murders' by Gypsy Rose Lee") but a snappy speech in which Stanwyck, playing a dancer, explains her *froideur* to a vaudeville comic who has the hots for her, and in so doing glances back at the rearing of Ruby Stevens:

> I went into show business when I was seven years old. Two days later the first comic I ever met stole my piggy bank at a railroad station in Portland. When I was eleven, the comics were looking at my ankles. When I was fourteen, they were . . . just lookin'.

During that brief pause, Stanwyck works in a shrug and the raise of an eyebrow. Film theory has dwelled, with justice, on what is called the objectifying male gaze—that is, the power of the camera to ogle and depersonalize, and to encourage the viewer to follow suit—without always remembering that, at Hollywood's height, there were plenty of people who could take that gaze like a punch and throw it right back. Stanwyck, by her own account, had practiced the response long before she stared into a lens: she recalled meeting the playwright Willard Mack in New York and regarding him "with impudent assurance, just to keep from turning around and running away." Master your own fear, in other words, and you end up frightening others.

It was Mack who cast her in her first straight play, "The Noose." It opened at the Hudson in October, 1926, and featured her as Barbara Stanwyck for the first time; the name had been soldered together from an actress named Jane Stanwyck and a play called "Barbara Frietchie." From here on, Stanwyck's story quickens its pace, so much so that the reader of Madsen's biography can be left floundering in her wake; it feels as if, having notched all the main misfortunes of life in her first twenty years, she grabbed her first lucky break and refused to let go. From "The Noose" she slipped into "Burlesque," at the Plymouth, which just happened to be seen by Louis B. Mayer, of M-G-M, and Joe Schenck, of United Artists. "If you ever want to do a movie part, just telephone me," Schenck said.

That sounds seigneurial to the point of cheesy, but Stanwyck, true to form, took the man at his word. She was anti-cheese. By March of 1929 she was in Los Angeles, starring in United Artists' "The Locked Door" opposite Rod La Rocque, who surely should have waited forty years and popped up in a Russ Meyer movie. She was also a married woman. In August of the previous year, she had wed in St. Louis, where the groom was on tour. Frank Fay was a comic, of the kind that burlesque ladies were meant to be wary of; he was a redheaded Irish-American bear, a boozer, and a huge draw on Broadway. And that was the problem. Hollywood warmed to him but never quite worked out how to use him, whereas his bride would soon become the Swiss Army knife of motion pictures. She could be used for anything—fighting, dancing, weeping, wailing, cracking wise. A young Frank Capra referred to her as a porcupine. On the strength of a screen test, he asked her to head the cast of "Ladies of Leisure," which came out in May of 1930.

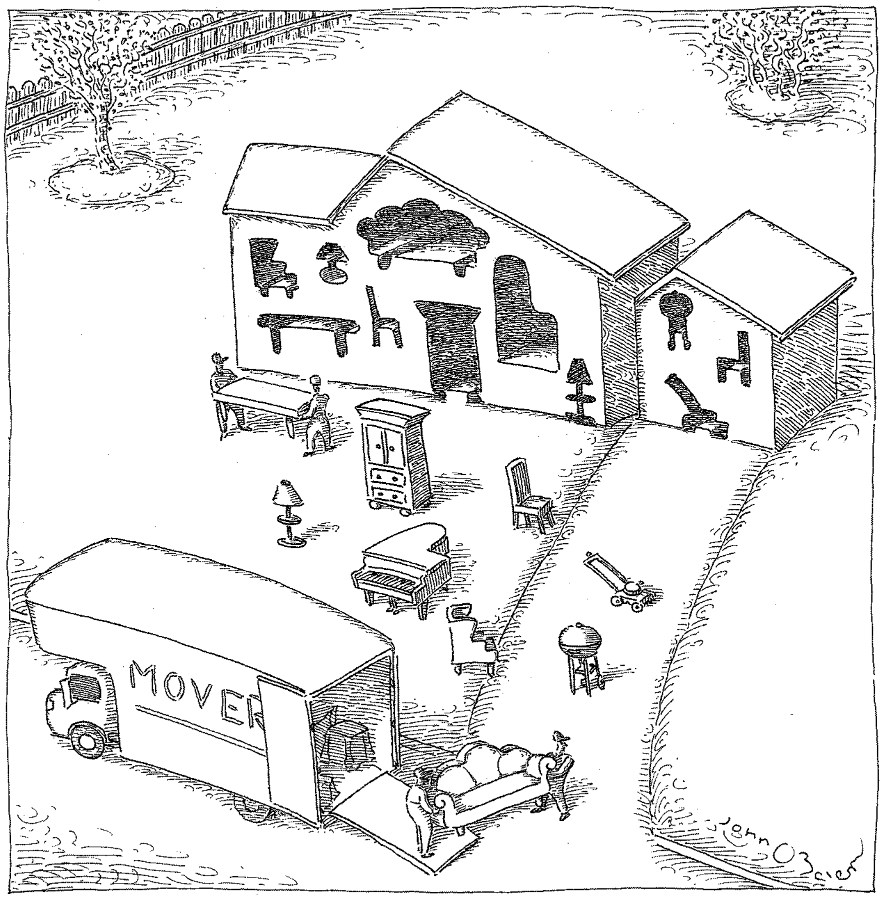


"Ladies of Leisure" should, by rights, be callow and crude. It is early Stanwyck, and early Capra—his fifth talkie, recorded in the springtime of sound. The face of her character, Kay Arnold, is like a mask from the silent era, with darkened lips and flashing, hard-lined eyes that were meant to compensate for the lack of speech. Yet the movie gives you a melancholy shock, for it proves how far the medium had come in less than twenty years, how swiftly its senses had ripened, and how meagre have been the advances since. Kay used to be a fun-seeker ("That's my racket. I'm a party girl"), but she fell for a rich guy, a painter, then lost him, and the bottom fell out of the fun. In one extraordinary scene, she stays overnight, on the painter's couch, while he takes the bed in the next room. Neither can sleep, and the erotic throb that Capra builds is near-tropical, with the camera picking up the wet, wide gleam of Stanwyck's gaze, and pulling back to show the torrent of rain that sheets down the windows behind the couch.

On one level, this is a matter of bewitching technical skill. The director of photography on "Ladies of Leisure" was Joseph Walker, who made five more films with Stanwyck, and who used to grind special lenses for each of his favorite actresses, the better to catch and refine their look. The lighting, too, as in "The Miracle Woman"—Stanwyck, Capra, Walker again, released the following year—is of an almost wounding beauty, far in advance of the amateur acoustics, with rim-lit details picked out like stars against the semi-dark. From there to the shadows of "The Godfather," as rich as chocolate, is really not so far.

The other note that rings out clearly from "Ladies of Leisure," and that would toll like a bell through the rest of Stanwyck's career, is the sound of a smart woman surveying, with a snicker and a sigh, the dumber sex. This was not strictly a matter of looking down. Stanwyck was a slip of a woman, less than five and a half feet tall, and she spent a lot of time onscreen looking upward at her leading men. The force that she wields there, however, is persuasive to the point of Napoleonic. Kay Arnold, on first meeting the painter, lifts her gaze, and there is a cool, smoky steadiness about it that is hard to read. It doesn't say, "Hello, big boy," or "Come down and see me sometime." The message it sends is "Hmm. Ain't no mountain." If she likes the fellow, she will scale him, but make no mistake: as a female, she is already a superior soul. Should she choose to open her heart, it will be only on the most condescending of terms. "I love him because he's the kind of a guy that gets drunk on a glass of buttermilk," Sugarpuss eventually says of Professor Potts. "I love him because he doesn't know how to kiss, the jerk." Ouch.

That stark declaration means, in effect, that the battle of the sexes is over before it has begun. The ouches would go off like firecrackers when Stanwyck was around, and she never let up, having learned her explosive trade before 1934, when the enforcement of the Hays Code—with its emphasis on "correct standards of life"—came along and dampened all the squibs. "Night Nurse" (1931), "Ladies They Talk About" (1933), "Baby Face" (1933): these are the kinds of Stanwyck projects that gave movies a bad, bad name. In the first, she waltzes into a hospital, smiles her way into a job, then changes into her uniform, hiking one leg into the lap of her fellow-nurse Joan Blondell, whom she has known for minutes, and letting her peel off the stocking. At night, a leering intern puts a med-school skeleton in Stanwyck's bed, so she hops into Blondell's, and the two of them giggle together in undergarments and fright. Buñuel himself could not have done better.

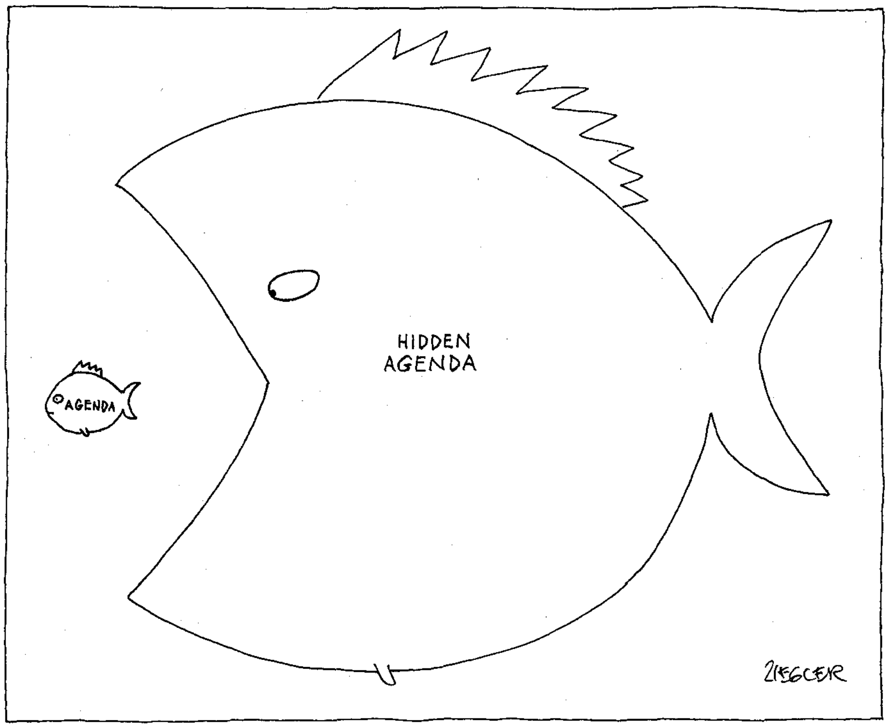


"Night Nurse," directed by William Wellman, is a stirred-up soup of a movie. We get abused children, a drunken mother, a wounded bootlegger, and a young, unfriendly Clark Gable as a chauffeur in black jodhpurs. He looks like an Italian Fascist, and he slugs Stanwyck so hard that her chin bleeds. Still, put next to "Baby Face," Wellman's film is about as naughty as "On Golden Pond." There is a case for saying that Alfred E. Green's "Baby Face" (which screens at BAM on a juicy double bill with "Ladies They Talk About," a female jailbird drama) didn't just predate the Hays Code; it actually brought the code crashing down onto Hollywood heads. Stanwyck is Lily Powers, who escapes from the steel mills of Pennsylvania, where her father tries to pimp her to anyone he chooses. With her black friend Chico (Theresa Harris), Lily arrives in New York, where she proceeds to sleep her way up a company; as her conquests mount, the camera ascends the side of the office building. She starts in personnel ("Have you had any experience?" "Plenty"), proceeds through filing and mortgages, and winds up bedding the vice-president ("Did Fuzzy-Wuzzy enjoy his dinner?"). The film loses its nerve at the close, but not before Lily has declared her loveless hand: "I'm not like other women—all the gentleness and kindness in me has been killed."

This was untrue of Stanwyck, who, if not a gregarious spirit, proved to be a durable friend to many in the picture business. She remained close to Joan Crawford, for instance, which shows a certain mettle. Yet there is no denying the lacquered hardness of Stanwyck's early roles, which continue to alarm us less with their carnal audacity than with what you might call their communal heart bypass. The Stanwyck heroine expends so much energy simply staying alive and intact, let alone forging a path through a mercantile society, that there is often no time left for the cultivation of sympathy. We sense this not merely in the snarling scripts but in the cut of the heroine's clothes and the deadened expressions on her face. When one of the lovers in "Baby Face" shoots himself, we hear no shriek of ladylike horror. Instead, a close-up catches Stanwyck in profile, the eyes unblinking beneath long lashes, her whole outline as immovable as marble.

In 1933, Radio City Music Hall was inaugurated with "The Bitter Tea of General Yen," Stanwyck's most ethereal film. When you learn that she plays a New England missionary in China, and that this casting decision seems perfectly logical, you will realize what a nutty creation the movie is. Her character is imprisoned, and made to wear silk pajamas, by the lordly officer of the title—a Chinaman played by Nils Asther, a gay Swede, who at one point comes to her in a dream sequence and ravishes her with long fingernails. (He has a nice collection of pickup lines, too: "You are evidently absorbed in the sublime effects of the spring moon upon my people.") The most unlikely thing is that this ungodly concoction, photographed by Joseph Walker with a breathed-upon gloss, was another Frank Capra film. How do you get from here to "Meet John Doe," another Capra-Stanwyck collaboration, made only eight years later? Who made the switch from opium pipe to apple pie? Well, the Hays Code kicked in, and the Depression convinced Capra that movies had a duty, or at least an opportunity, to instruct and inspire; "Meet John Doe," with its beatification of the common man and its scowling exposure of Fascism, feels like a movie preparing for war. Yet somehow it feels corny and cooked up, whereas beneath the silliness of "General Yen" there simmers an emotional truth, with the heroine half yielding to raptures that she knows to be both improper and doomed. It isn't just that the camera loved Stanwyck. The director did, too.

Nobody knows for sure whether Capra and his leading lady were ever an item. His biographer Joseph McBride proclaims it as fact; hers, Axel Madsen, is less certain, one of the abiding mysteries of Stanwyck being that her public image—unlike Jean Harlow's, say—could never be mapped in any detail onto the contours of her private existence. She was definitely *there*, funny and silvery, up on the screen, but the definition faded as you tried to peek behind. Her movies felt like cryptic clues to a backstory of will power and frustration, the truth of which would not have pleased her fans.



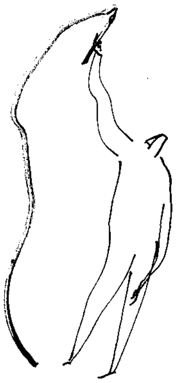
The marriage to Frank Fay, for instance, was a bust, made worse when the couple tried to make it better by adopting a child, Dion, at the end of 1932. (Fay once got so drunk that he threw the boy into the swimming pool.) Three years later, when Stanwyck filed for divorce, she was awarded sole custody, but motherhood came hard to her. Dion, an awkward boy, was screamed at and shipped off to boarding school at the age of six. "She threw me away like so much garbage," he later said. They met for the last time when he was twenty and about to leave for military service; his mother shook his hand, told him to behave himself, and that was that. In 1960, it was reported that he had been arrested for selling pornography. In 1984, he expounded on his misery to the *National Enquirer*. Stanwyck herself mentioned him less and less; we cannot guess what love means, or fails to mean, to a woman who grew up without it. All we can do is marvel and squirm at the steeliness of an actress who took on "Stella Dallas" (1937), the tale of a mother who sacrifices everything for the sake of her child, eventually giving that child up to the embrace of a better and less vulgar household. "I don't want to be like me," her character says at the start, as if from the jaws of a trap.

Stanwyck, always one to put on a formidable front, married again, in 1939, this time to Robert Taylor. "Miss Stanwyck is not the sort of woman I'd have met in Nebraska," Taylor had said. He was the more godlike performer, she the more racy. Their coming together was a gift to the fan magazines and the publicists: "They made you—*made you*—go out two or three nights a week," Stanwyck said of her employers at M-G-M. Husband and wife were robust Republicans; both belonged to the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, which was responsible for, among other things, alerting Washington to what was perceived as the Communist menace in Hollywood. Stanwyck's conservatism never did an inch of damage to her reputation, but Taylor is now remembered primarily, if unfairly, as a snitch, the guy who named names at the HUAC hearings in 1947. In the end, what led to their divorce, in 1951, was not political ardor, or even romantic gossip. (Taylor was seduced by Ava Gardner, but in the movie industry that was like pulling into a gas station for an oil check.) He and Stanwyck just peeled apart, seeking different things. Revered for her calm at work, she was a scold and a shouter at home, and he, after wartime service in the Navy, couldn't take orders forever. When Stanwyck led Gary Cooper by the nose, in "Ball of Fire," it was a riot, but in real life the laughter died at her door.

Taylor was reputedly drawn to men as well as to women, and the same has been said of Barbara Stanwyck. She is idolized by gay viewers, male and female, yet her own sexual leanings are not the point. I don't want to sound like Howard Strickling, the king of publicity at M-G-M, who could keep a nuclear test on Sunset Boulevard under wraps, but, whatever Stanwyck did with her libido in the safety of her own home, it cannot possibly have matched the sins of the flesh into which her characters were lured. When Douglas Sirk sought her out for "All I Desire" (1953), it was because he needed a woman who could leave town (and her three children), come back a decade later, coax her dead marriage into life, tend an old flame, and still find time to make eyes at her daughter's boyfriend. "I'm crazy about you, baby," MacMurray says in "Double Indemnity," running the words together under the pressure of lust. (The craze works: she lures him into doing away with her husband and claims the insurance.) As for "Forty Guns," the title is accurate; Stanwyck plays a ranch owner, Jessica Drummond, with twoscore men under her thumb. Such eminence should make her a grandma, yet, at dinner, the jewels glitter like bait on her bosom, and when a strapping young marshal turns up she wastes no time in reaching for his weapon:

> "May I feel it? Just curious."
> "May go off in your face."
> "I'll take a chance."

As so often with Stanwyck, you can read the scene two ways. Is Jessica seeking to rejuvenate herself like a vampire in the company of men, or is she fooling with boys and their toys in a show of lesbian disdain? We should not be surprised at such doubleness. Frankly, it would be strange if a vocation as labile and inquisitive as acting were not to reach out to unfamiliar passions, beyond the limits of the actor's personal preference. Why bother with gossip about Laurence Olivier when you can watch him in "Spartacus" and follow his rapt dramatic intelligence as it explores, as if by fingertip, the rich possibilities of Tony Curtis? The same holds for Stanwyck, whose movies tend to present her either with a surfeit of men, offering safety in numbers, or with a single dumb sap, whom she pursues with the violence of unspecified revenge. "I need him like the axe needs the turkey."



That line always gets a laugh, as it should, for it springs from "The Lady Eve" (1941), one of the most liberatingly funny films ever made. Step back for a second, though, and you can still hear the "alert, precocious, and savage" tone that Stanwyck ascribed to her ruptured childhood. "The Lady Eve" is a Preston Sturges movie, which means that it does not and probably cannot stop, hurling Stanwyck headlong into the chase. First, she is a cardsharp who sucks money from a wandering heir (Henry Fonda) on an ocean liner; then, scarred by his rejection, she becomes an English *grande dame*, bewitching him into a series of emasculating pratfalls; finally, she reverts to her first persona, fooling everyone except Muggsy, the hero's cynical valet. "Positively the same dame," he growls in the final shot, refusing to believe that life is anything but a fix.

Muggsy, though he doesn't know it, may be Stanwyck's most perceptive analyst. As he sees her slip from one character to the next, and struggles to get a handle on her basic needs, he is answering the suspicions of the moviegoing public. Stanwyck was a star, a whole star, and nothing but a star, yet what greeted her was a sort of reverential bafflement. Who *was* this broad? Most people, even now, have a basic, cartoonish notion of Bette Davis; without so much as watching a Davis movie, they know what to expect from those head-

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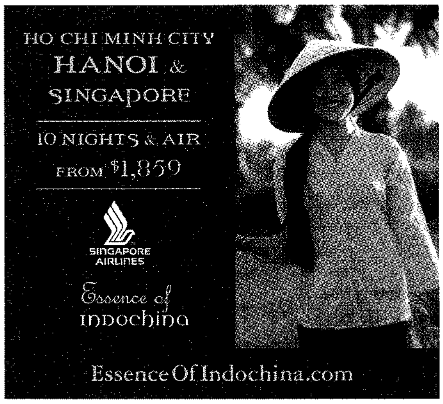

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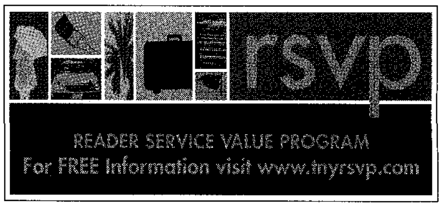

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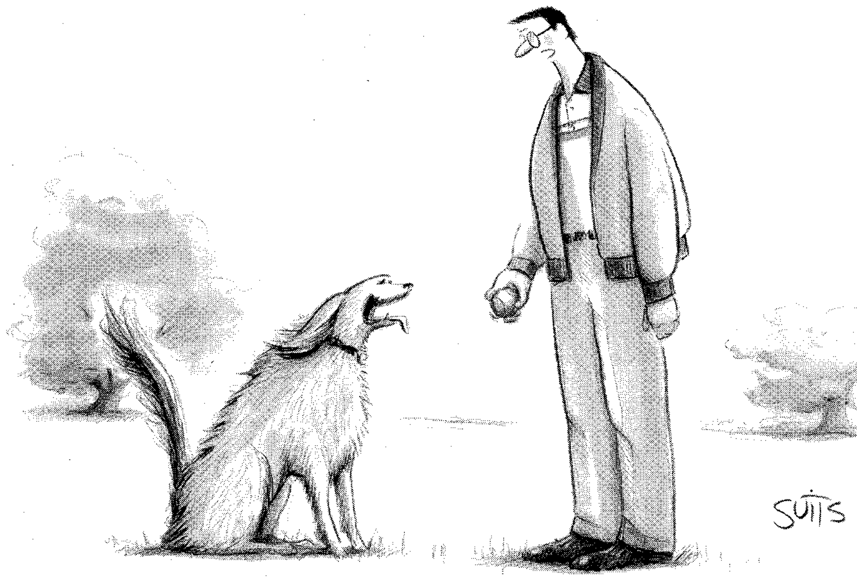

"Let's try it again. This time with a tad less mania."

• •

lamp eyeballs and that lofted rasp. Stanwyck could turn on the chill—her performance opposite Van Heflin and a boyish Kirk Douglas in "The Strange Love of Martha Ivers" (1946) appears to run on liquid nitrogen—but she could also throw out hints of tenderness when you least expected it, and languid little one-liners when they weren't appropriate. One night, Heflin drives her up a hill to survey Iverstown, the small city that Martha more or less owns, and where she has grown sour—the old, noirish tale of power without joy. He tells her not to look back, and reminds her that Lot's wife did the same and turned into a pillar of salt. Dry as salt herself, she asks, "What happened to Lot?"

Stanwyck's greatest strength, in other words—her range—was also the reason that she is impossible to tie down and tame. No genre was beyond her, and no one movie sums her up. She motors from role to role like Heflin cruising into Iverstown, or Robert Mitchum in "Out of the Past," drifting from town to town as though in and out of a fever. You catch "Stella Dallas" on TV and decide that nobody could jerk a tear like Stanwyck. Then on comes "Ball of Fire" and the sight of Sugarpuss, gleaming like fresh paint on the professor's threshold. "Hi-de-ho!" she cries, and makes that *chlk-chlk* sound you use to gee up a horse. You think that "The Lady Eve" marks her as the best and most devil-tongued comedienne of her time, up there with Katharine Hepburn and the Rosalind Russell of "His Girl Friday"? Correct, but consider the moment when Henry Fonda, an amateur natural historian, claims that snakes are his life. "What a life!" reads the published screenplay, but that's not what Stanwyck delivers. "What a life," she says, with mild wistfulness, as if noting for an instant what a loner this rich boy truly is, and how he might want to be wooed for something other than his cash. Sometimes the sadness flits by so fast that you can sneeze and miss it: In the boxing drama "Golden Boy" (1939), based on a play by Clifford Odets, Stanwyck interrupts a rant from her fiancé (Adolphe Menjou), who is lambasting New York for not being the money fountain that it was in 1928. Stanwyck is lighting a cigarette; she halts, looks up, and murmurs through the cloud of smoke, "My mother died in '28."

Is there a glint of actual mother love there, for the Catherine Stevens who died in the winter of 1909? Stanwyck spoke sparingly of her past; history, for her, had begun in Hollywood, and it would end there. She travelled a few times to Europe and loathed everything about it. ("All the charm of the Old World, and the Old World plumbing," as Lily Powers says in "Baby Face.") Her career was at its most hectic and fruitful in the thirty-two years between "Ladies of Leisure" and "Clash by Night," in which she confided to Marilyn Monroe that all she required in a man was "someone to fight off the blizzards and the floods." In reality, such a fellow never came along, and, after divorcing Taylor, she had to content herself with friendship. There was Frank Sinatra's ex-wife Nancy, as well as a number of established couples—the Jack Bennys, the Joel McCreas, the William Holdens. In 1954, she shot "Cattle Queen of Montana," with Ronald Reagan, in Glacier National Park, where the Blackfoot Indians named her Princess Many Victories III. According to Reagan, there was "not one whimper out of Stanwyck" as she gamely did her own stunts and swam in an icy lake. The movie was only her second in color; she looked sporty enough, but, as with many stars of her vintage, the added richness felt superfluous, draining a dram of her mystery. Even Douglas Sirk, the master colorist, stuck to black-and-white when he hired Stanwyck for two of her final melodramas, "All I Desire" and "There's Always Tomorrow" (1956). Sirk found in her "an amazing tragic stillness," while praising her discretion: "She gets every point, every nuance without hitting on anything too heavily." The closeup of her tears, in the first of those films, as her character walks up the path to her family home, to the sound of violins, should be the merest hokum, yet it stirs us like the last dying echo from the age of Garbo. And remember: Stanwyck herself never had a family home.

As the movies flickered, Stanwyck, no snob, glided across to television. She hosted "The Barbara Stanwyck Show," which started in 1960 and ran for thirty-six episodes before NBC pulled the plug. Madsen observes that, in introducing the program, she seemed ill at ease; when the call came to be herself, that famous equilibrium broke down—something that Stanwyckians had never witnessed before. Throughout her career, she had been the purest pro: always on time, like a perfect schoolgirl, with her lines down pat and a ready jab at anyone who arrived in lesser shape. Crews adored her, and nervy débutants, like the curly-topped, barely recognizable William Holden in "Golden Boy," were indebted to her. Occasional chinks show up in the bonhomie; Kirk Douglas claimed that she ignored him in "The Strange Love of Martha Ivers," and Cyd Charisse said much the same of "East Side, West Side" (1949), although that is more easily excused. After twenty years in the business, Stanwyck had met someone with better legs.

The later years of Stanwyck, up till her death in 1990, at the age of eighty-two, were not the lonely collapse to which so many stars succumb. In "Roustabout" (1964), she ran a carnival and sparred energetically with Elvis ("You're a cruel boy"). In 1973, she was inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, in Oklahoma City, for "Outstanding Contribution to the West Through Motion Pictures," which isn't bad for a native of Brooklyn. She appeared in "The Thorn Birds," lustrously white-haired, clinging to Richard Chamberlain (now, *there's* an unlikely couple) and returning to the old Cartesian theme: "Inside this stupid body I am still young, I still feel, I still want, I still dream, and I still love you." As her TV career progressed, film historians were sent scurrying to their reference books. Was there any other actress who had appeared both in a silent movie—"Broadway Nights," made three years before "Ladies of Leisure"—and in "Dynasty"? To raise the stakes a little, was there any other actress who encompassed so many chapters of what we take to be the history of Hollywood?

Like many of her generation, and of her stern political persuasion, Stanwyck scorned the unshackled morals of the nineteen-sixties, reluctant to relish the irony that it was the movies of her youth that had broken those shackles in the first place. She had been a dame, a founding member of that trim, yakkety-yak sisterhood which saw no reason that men should rule the roost and no contretemps so sticky that a woman could not oil her way out of it through dialogue alone. "You take a chance the day you're born. Why stop now?" she asks in "Golden Boy." Everything about Stanwyck, whatever the mood of the movie, bears a slight graze of screwball, as if, deep down, Ruby Stevens was sly enough to have rumbled mankind for the untrustable species that it was. That is why "Double Indemnity," though it sweats blood and deals with the lowest of low morals, somehow streams along with the glee of black comedy. The damn thing flows like Mozart. I even worship the leading lady's wig, with its radioactive spring roll at the front. ("We hire Barbara Stanwyck and here we get George Washington," the head of Paramount said.) Watch the early scenes in Stanwyck's home and try not to grin like MacMurray when he first spies her at the top of the stairs, wearing a bath towel and a look of infinite mischief. She gets dressed, for decency's sake, although, given that her outfit includes high heels with pom-poms and an ankle bracelet engraved with the name Phyllis, it might have been better for MacMurray if she hadn't. Decency was never dirtier.

After the press screening, Stanwyck said of Phyllis, "I'm afraid to go home with her. She's such a bitch." Stanwyck was by any standards a self-made woman, yet here she was, flinching at one of the selves that she had summoned, as though it were no longer her responsibility. When Billy Wilder first offered her the part, she had been no less wary:

> I said, "I love the script, and I love you, but I'm a little afraid after all these years of playing heroines to go into an out-and-out cold-blooded killer." And Mr. Wilder—and rightly so—looked at me and said, "Are you a mouse or an actress?" And I said, "I *hope* I'm an actress." He said, "Then do the part."

In the world according to Barbara Stanwyck, all the mice are men. She was something else, with claws, and her genius was to show us plenty of fur but never let us agree on what that something was—the moll, the missionary, the bad mother, or the Keep Kool Cutie. On the set, she was a paragon of control, yet Capra used to run three or four cameras in an effort to capture her on the first and freshest take, believing that with every repeat she lost the shine of spontaneity. Listen to her in "Clash by Night," fending off a dolt: "What kind of animal am I? Do I have fangs, do I purr? What kind of jungle am I from? You don't know anything about me." No, and it drives us mad. Crazy about you, baby. ♦

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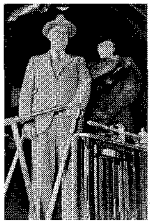

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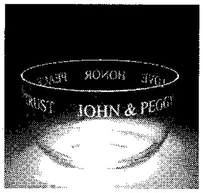

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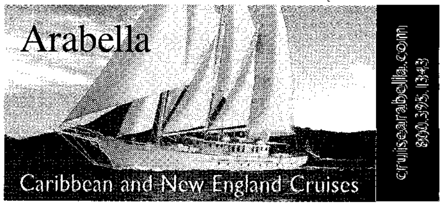


ANNALS OF MEDICINE

THE WAY WE AGE NOW

Medicine has increased the ranks of the elderly. Can it make old age any easier?

BY ATUL GAWANDE

The hardest substance in the human body is the white enamel of the teeth. With age, it wears away nonetheless, allowing the softer, darker layers underneath to show through. Meanwhile, the blood supply to the pulp and the roots of the teeth atrophies, and the flow of saliva diminishes; the gums tend to become inflamed and pull away from the teeth, exposing the base, making them unstable and elongating their appearance, especially the lower ones. Experts say they can gauge a person's age to within five years from the examination of a single tooth—if the person has any teeth left to examine.

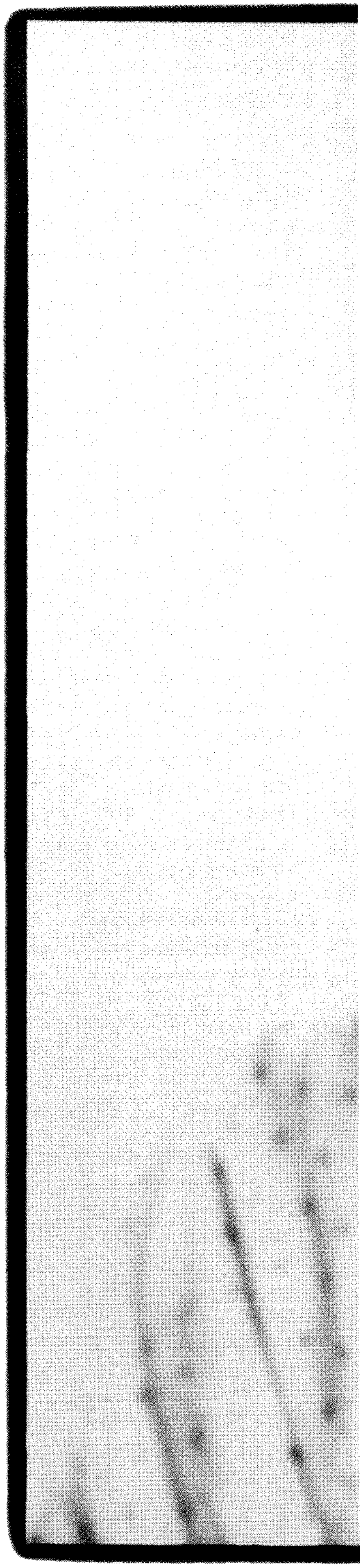
Scrupulous dental care can help avert tooth loss, but growing old gets in the way. Arthritis, tremors, and small strokes, for example, make it difficult to brush and floss, and, because nerves become less sensitive with age, people may not realize that they have cavity and gum problems until it's too late. In the course of a normal lifetime, the muscles of the jaw lose about forty per cent of their mass and the bones of the mandible lose about twenty per cent, becoming porous and weak. The ability to chew declines, and people shift to softer foods, which are generally higher in fermentable carbohydrates and more likely to cause cavities. By the age of sixty, Americans have lost, on average, a third of their teeth. After eighty-five, almost forty per cent have no teeth at all.

Even as our bones and teeth soften, the rest of our body hardens. Blood vessels, joints, the muscle and valves of the heart, and even the lungs pick up substantial deposits of calcium and turn stiff. Under a microscope, the vessels and soft tissues display the same form of calcium that you find in bone. When you reach inside an elderly patient during surgery, the aorta and other major vessels often feel crunchy under your fingers. A recent study has found that loss of bone density may be an even better predictor of death from atherosclerotic disease than cholesterol levels. As we age, it's as if the calcium flows out of our skeletons and into our tissues.

To maintain the same volume of blood flow through narrowed and stiffened blood vessels, the heart has to generate increased pressure. As a result, more than half of us develop hypertension by the age of sixty-five. The heart becomes thicker-walled from having to pump against the pressure, and less able to respond to the demands of exertion. The peak output of the heart decreases steadily from the age of thirty. People become gradually less able to run as far or as fast as they used to, or to climb a flight of stairs without becoming short of breath.

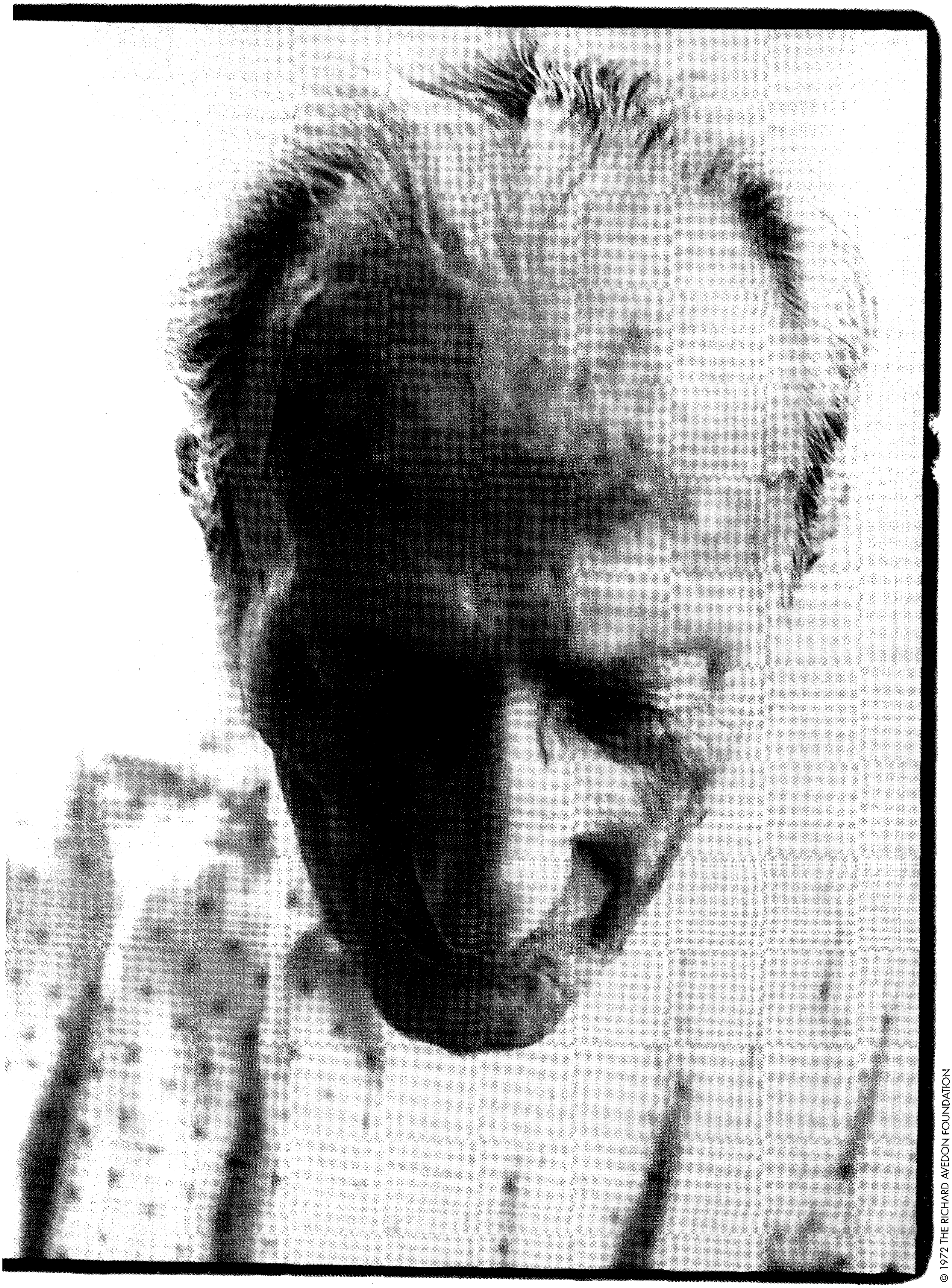
Why we age is the subject of vigorous debate. The classical view is that aging happens because of random wear and tear. A newer view holds that aging is more orderly and genetically driven. Proponents of this view point out that animals of similar species and exposure to wear and tear have markedly different life spans. The Canada goose has a longevity of 23.5 years; the emperor goose only 6.3 years. Perhaps animals are like plants, with lives that are, to a large extent, internally governed. Certain species of bamboo, for instance, form a dense stand that grows and flourishes for a hundred years, flowers all at once, and then dies.

The idea that living things shut down



PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Jacob Israel Avedon, Sarasota, Florida, December 19, 1972. This portrait is part of a series that the photographer made to record his father's last years.



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and not just wear down has received substantial support in the past decade. Researchers working with the now famous worm *C. elegans* (two of the last five Nobel Prizes in medicine went to scientists doing work on the little nematode) were able to produce worms that live more than twice as long and age more slowly by altering a single gene. Scientists have since come up with single-gene alterations that increase the life spans of *Drosophila* fruit flies, mice, and yeast.

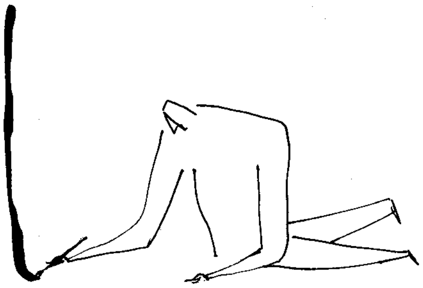
These findings notwithstanding, scientists do not believe that our life spans are actually programmed into us. After all, for most of our hundred-thousand-year existence—all but the past couple of hundred years—the average life span of human beings has been thirty years or less. (Research suggests that subjects of the Roman Empire had an average life expectancy of twenty-eight years.) Today, the average life span in developed countries is almost eighty years. If human life spans depend on our genetics, then medicine has got the upper hand. We are, in a way, freaks living well beyond our appointed time. So when we study aging what we are trying to understand is not so much a natural process as an unnatural one. Inheritance has surprisingly little influence on longevity. James Vaupel, of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, in Rostock, Germany, notes that only six per cent of how long you'll live, compared with the average, is explained by your parents' longevity; by contrast, up to ninety per cent of how tall you are, compared with the average, is explained by your parents' height. Even genetically identical twins vary widely in life span: the typical gap is more than fifteen years.

If our genes explain less than we imagined, the wear-and-tear model may explain more than we knew. Leonid Gavrilov, a researcher at the University of Chicago, argues that human beings fail the way all complex systems fail: randomly and gradually. As engineers have long recognized, many simple devices do not age. They function reliably until a critical component fails, and the whole thing dies instantly. A windup toy works smoothly until a gear rusts or a spring breaks, and then it doesn't work at all. But complex systems—power plants, say—have to survive and function despite having thousands of critical components. Engineers therefore design these machines with multiple layers of redundancy: with backup systems, and backup systems for the backup systems. The backups may not be as efficient as the first-line components, but they allow the machine to keep going even as damage accumulates. Gavrilov argues that, within the parameters established by our genes, that's exactly how human beings appear to work. We have an extra kidney, an extra lung, an extra gonad, extra teeth. The DNA in our cells is frequently damaged under routine conditions, but our cells have a number of DNA repair systems. If a key gene is permanently damaged, there are usually extra copies of the gene nearby. And, if the entire cell dies, other cells can fill in.

Nonetheless, as the defects in a complex system increase, the time comes when just one more defect is enough to impair the whole, resulting in the condition known as frailty. It happens to power plants, cars, and large organizations. And it happens to us: eventually, one too many joints are damaged, one too many arteries calcify. There are no more backups. We wear down until we can't wear down anymore.

It happens in a bewildering array of ways. Hair grows gray, for instance, simply because we run out of the pigment cells that give hair its color. The natural life cycle of the scalp's pigment cells is just a few years. We rely on stem cells under the surface to migrate in and replace them. Gradually, however, the stem-cell reservoir is used up. By the age of fifty, as a result, half of the average person's hairs have gone gray.

Inside skin cells, the mechanisms that clear out waste products slowly break down and the muck coalesces into a clot of gooey yellow-brown pigment known as lipofuscin. These are the age spots we see in skin. When lipofuscin accumulates in sweat glands, the sweat glands cannot function, which helps explain why we become so susceptible to heat stroke and heat exhaustion in old age.



The eyes go for different reasons. The lens is made of crystallin proteins that are tremendously durable, but they change chemically in ways that diminish their elasticity over time—hence the farsightedness that most people develop beginning in their fourth decade. The process also gradually yellows the lens. Even without cataracts (the whitish clouding of the lens caused by excessive ultraviolet exposure, high cholesterol, diabetes, cigarette smoking, and other unhelpful conditions), the amount of light reaching the retina of a healthy sixty-year-old is one-third that of a twenty-year-old.

I spoke to Felix Silverstone, who for twenty-four years was the senior geriatrician at the Parker Jewish Institute, in New York, and has published more than a hundred studies on aging. There is, he said, "no single, common cellular mechanism to the aging process." Our bodies accumulate lipofuscin and oxygen free-radical damage and random DNA mutations and numerous other microcellular problems. The process is gradual and unrelenting. "We just fall apart," he said.

This is not an appealing prospect, and people naturally prefer to avoid the subject of their decrepitude. There have been dozens of best-selling books on aging, but they tend to have titles like "Younger Next Year," "The Fountain of Age," "Ageless," "The Sexy Years." Still, there are costs to averting our eyes from the realities. For one thing, we put off changes that we need to make as a society. For another, we deprive ourselves of opportunities to change the individual experience of aging for the better.

For nearly all of human existence, people died young. Life expectancy improved as we overcame early death—in particular, deaths from childbirth, infection, and traumatic injury. By the nineteen-seventies, just four out of every hundred people born in industrialized countries died before the age of thirty. It was an extraordinary achievement, but one that seemed to leave little room for further gain; even *eliminating* deaths before thirty would not raise over-all life expectancy significantly. Efforts shifted, therefore, to reducing deaths during middle and old age, and, in the decades since, the average life span has continued upward. Improvements in the treatment and prevention of heart disease, respiratory illness, stroke, cancer, and the like mean that the average sixty-five-year-old can expect to live another nineteen years—almost four years longer than was the case in 1970. (By contrast, from the nineteenth century to 1970, sixty-five-year-olds gained just three years of life expectancy.)

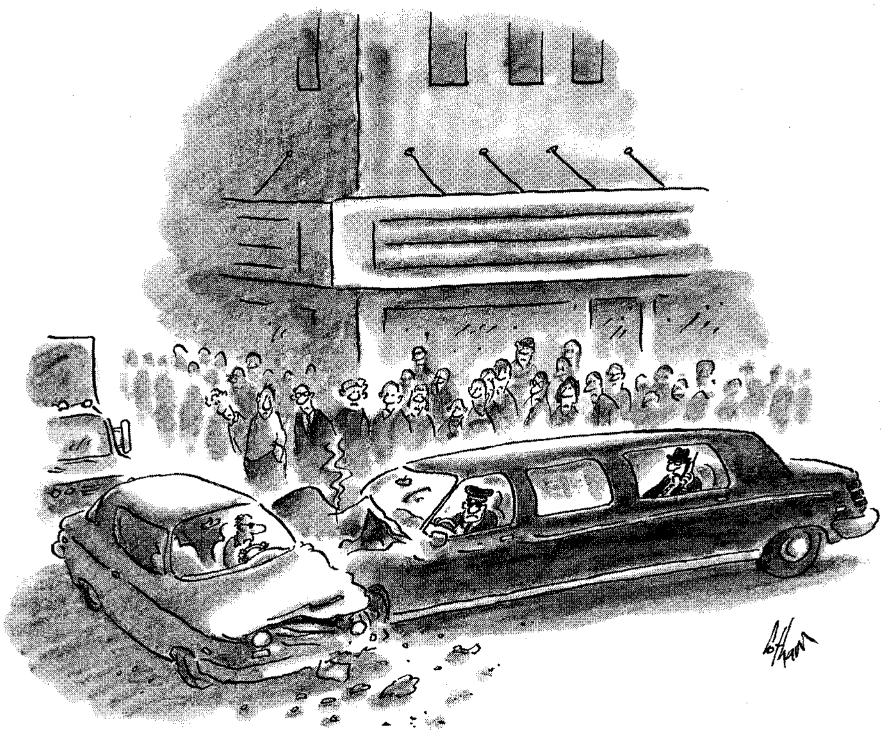
The result has been called the "rectangularization" of survival. Throughout most of human history, a society's population formed a sort of pyramid: young children represented the largest portion—the base—and each successively older cohort represented a smaller and smaller group. In 1950, children under the age of five were eleven per cent of the U.S. population, adults aged forty-five to forty-nine were six per cent, and those over eighty were one per cent. Today, we have as many fifty-year-olds as five-year-olds. In thirty years, there will be as many people over eighty as there are under five.

Americans haven't come to grips with the new demography. We cling to the notion of retirement at sixty-five—a reasonable notion when those over sixty-five were a tiny percentage of the population, but completely untenable as they approach twenty per cent. People are putting aside less in savings for old age now than they have in any decade since the Great Depression. More than half of the very old now live without a spouse, and we have fewer children than ever before—yet we give virtually no thought to how we will live out our later years alone.

Equally worrying, and far less recognized, medicine has been slow to confront the very changes that it has been responsible for—or to apply the knowledge we already have about how to make old age better. Despite a rapidly growing elderly population, the number of certified geriatricians fell by a third between 1998 and 2004. Applications to training programs in adult primary-care medicine are plummeting, while fields like plastic surgery and radiology receive applications in record numbers. Partly, this has to do with money—incomes in geriatrics and adult primary care are among the lowest in medicine. And partly, whether we admit it or not, most doctors don't like taking care of the elderly.

"Mainstream doctors are turned off by geriatrics, and that's because they do not have the faculties to cope with the Old Crock," Felix Silverstone, the geriatrician, explained to me. "The Old Crock is deaf. The Old Crock has poor vision. The Old Crock's memory might be somewhat impaired. With the Old Crock, you have to slow down, because he asks you to repeat what you are saying or asking. And the Old Crock doesn't just have a chief complaint—the Old Crock has fifteen chief complaints. How in the world are you going to cope with all of them? You're overwhelmed. Besides, he's had a number of these things for fifty years or so. You're not going to cure something he's had for fifty years. He has high blood pressure. He has diabetes. He has arthritis. There's nothing glamorous about taking care of any of those things."

There is, however, a skill to it, a developed body of professional expertise. And until I visited my hospital's geriatrics clinic and saw the work that geriatricians do, I did not fully grasp the nature of that expertise, or how important it could be for all of us.



"There's been an accident, but it doesn't involve me."

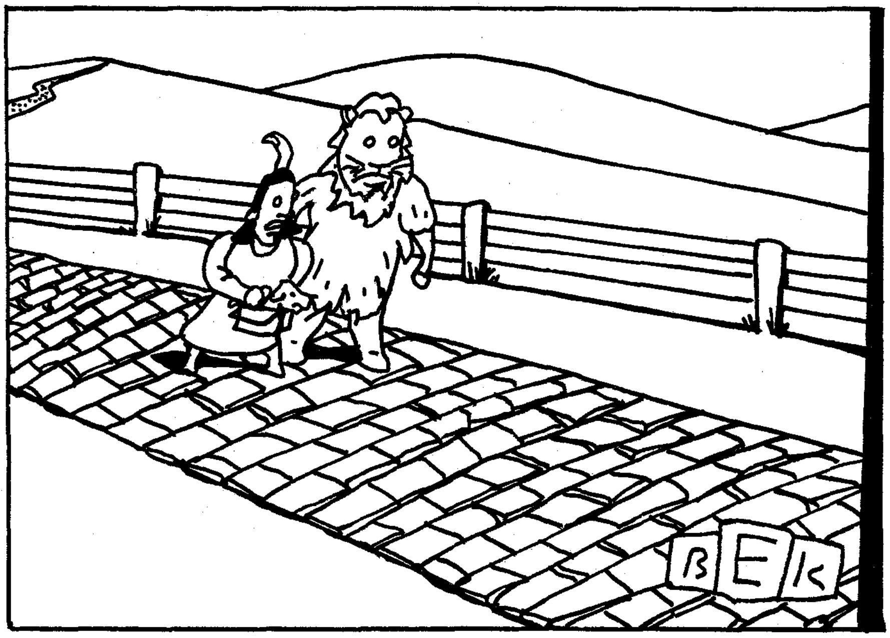
• •

The geriatrics clinic—or, as my hospital calls it, the Center for Older Adult Health—is only one floor below my surgery clinic. I pass by it almost every day, and I can't remember ever giving it a moment's thought. One morning, however, I wandered downstairs and, with the permission of the patients, sat in on a few visits with Juergen Bludau, the chief geriatrician.

"What brings you here today?" the doctor asked Jean Gavrilles, his first patient of the morning. She was eighty-five years old, with short, frizzy white hair, oval glasses, a lavender knit shirt, and a sweet, ready smile. Small but sturdy in appearance, she had come in walking steadily, her purse and coat clutched under one arm, her daughter trailing behind her, no support required beyond her mauve orthopedic shoes. She said that her internist had recommended that she come.

About anything in particular? the doctor asked.

The answer, it seemed, was yes and



"There are probably a lot of great bravery workshops out there."

no. The first thing she mentioned was a lower-back pain that she'd had for months, which shot down her leg and sometimes made it difficult to get out of bed or up from a chair. She also had bad arthritis, and she showed us her fingers, which were swollen at the knuckles and bent out to the sides with what's called a swan-neck deformity. She'd had both knees replaced a decade earlier. She had high blood pressure "from stress," she said, and handed him her list of medications. She had glaucoma and needed to have eye exams every four months. She never used to have "bathroom problems," but lately, she admitted, she'd started wearing a pad. She'd also had surgery for colon cancer and, by the way, now had a lung nodule that the radiology report said could be a metastasis—a biopsy was recommended.

Bludau asked her to tell him about her life. She said that she lived alone, except for her Yorkshire terrier, in a single-family house in the West Roxbury section of Boston. Her husband died of lung cancer twenty-three years ago. She did not drive. She had a son living in the area who did her shopping once a week and checked on her each day—"just to see if I'm still alive," she joked. Another son and two daughters lived farther away, but they helped as well. Otherwise, she took care of herself quite capably. She did her own cooking and cleaning. She managed her medicines and her bills. "I have a system," she said. She had a high-school education, and during the war she'd worked as a riveter at the Charlestown Navy Yard. She also worked for a time at the Jordan Marsh department store in downtown Boston. But that was a long time ago. She stuck to home now, with her yard and her terrier and her family when they visited.

The doctor asked her about her day in great detail. She usually woke around five or six o'clock, she said—she didn't seem to need much sleep anymore. She would get out of bed as the back pain allowed, take a shower, and get dressed. Downstairs, she'd take her medicines, feed the dog, and eat breakfast. Bludau asked what she had for breakfast. Cereal and a banana. She hated bananas, she said, but she'd heard they were good for her potassium, so she was afraid to stop. After breakfast, she'd take her dog for a little walk in the yard. She did chores—laundry, cleaning, and the like. In the late morning, she took a break to watch "The Price Is Right." At lunchtime, she had a sandwich and orange juice. If the weather was nice, she'd sit out in the yard afterward. She'd loved working in her garden, but she couldn't do that anymore. The afternoons were slow. She might do some more chores. She might nap or talk on the phone. Eventually, she would make dinner—a salad and maybe a baked potato or a scrambled egg. At night, she watched the Red Sox or the Patriots or college basketball—she loved sports. She usually went to bed at about midnight.

Bludau asked her to sit on the examining table. As she struggled to climb up, her balance teetering on the step, the doctor held her arm. He checked her blood pressure, which was normal. He examined her eyes and ears and had her open her mouth. He listened to her heart and lungs briskly, through his stethoscope. He began to slow down only when he looked at her hands. The nails were neatly trimmed.

"Who cuts your nails?" he asked.

"I do," Gavrilles replied.

I tried to think what could be accomplished in this visit. She was in good condition for her age, but she faced everything from advancing arthritis and incontinence to what might be metastatic colon cancer. It seemed to me that, with just a forty-minute visit, Bludau needed to triage by zeroing in on either the most potentially life-threatening problem (the possible metastasis) or the problem that bothered her the most (the back pain). But this was evidently not what he thought. He asked almost nothing about either issue. Instead, he spent much of the exam looking at her feet.

"Is that really necessary?" she asked, when he instructed her to take off her shoes and socks.

"Yes," he said. After she'd left, he told me, "You must always examine the feet." He described a bow-tied gentleman who seemed dapper and fit, until his feet revealed the truth: he couldn't bend down to reach them, and they turned out not to have been cleaned in weeks, suggesting neglect and real danger.

Gavrilles had difficulty taking her shoes off, and, after watching her struggle a bit, Bludau leaned in to help. When he got her socks off, he took her feet in his hands, one at a time. He inspected them inch by inch—the soles, the toes, the web spaces. Then he helped her get her socks and shoes back on and gave her and her daughter his assessment.

She was doing impressively well, he said. She was mentally sharp and physically strong. The danger for her was losing what she had. The single most serious threat she faced was not the lung nodule or the back pain. It was falling. Each year, about three hundred and fifty thousand Americans fall and break a hip. Of those, forty per cent end up in a nursing home, and twenty per cent are never able to walk again. The three primary risk factors for falling are poor balance, taking more than four prescription medications, and muscle weakness. Elderly people without these risk factors have a twelve-per-cent chance of falling in a year. Those with all three risk factors have almost a hundred-per-cent chance. Jean Gavrilles had at least two. Her balance was poor. Though she didn't need a walker, he had noticed her splay-footed gait as she came in. Her feet were swollen. The toenails were unclipped. There were sores between the toes. And the balls of her feet had thick, rounded calluses.

She was also on five medications. Each was undoubtedly useful, but, together, the usual side effects would include dizziness. In addition, one of the blood-pressure medications was a diuretic, and she seemed to drink few liquids, risking dehydration and a worsening of the dizziness. Her tongue was bone dry when Bludau examined it.

She did not have significant muscle weakness, and that was good. When she got out of her chair, he said, he noted that she had not used her arms to push herself up. She simply stood up—a sign of well-preserved muscle strength. From the details of the day she described, however, she did not seem to be eating nearly enough calories to maintain that strength. Bludau asked her whether her weight had changed recently. She admitted that she had lost about seven pounds in the previous six months.

The job of any doctor, Bludau later told me, is to support quality of life, by which he meant two things: as much freedom from the ravages of disease as possible, and the retention of enough function for active engagement in the world. Most doctors treat disease, and figure that the rest will take care of itself. And if it doesn't—if a patient is becoming infirm and heading toward a nursing home—well, that isn't really a *medical* problem, is it?

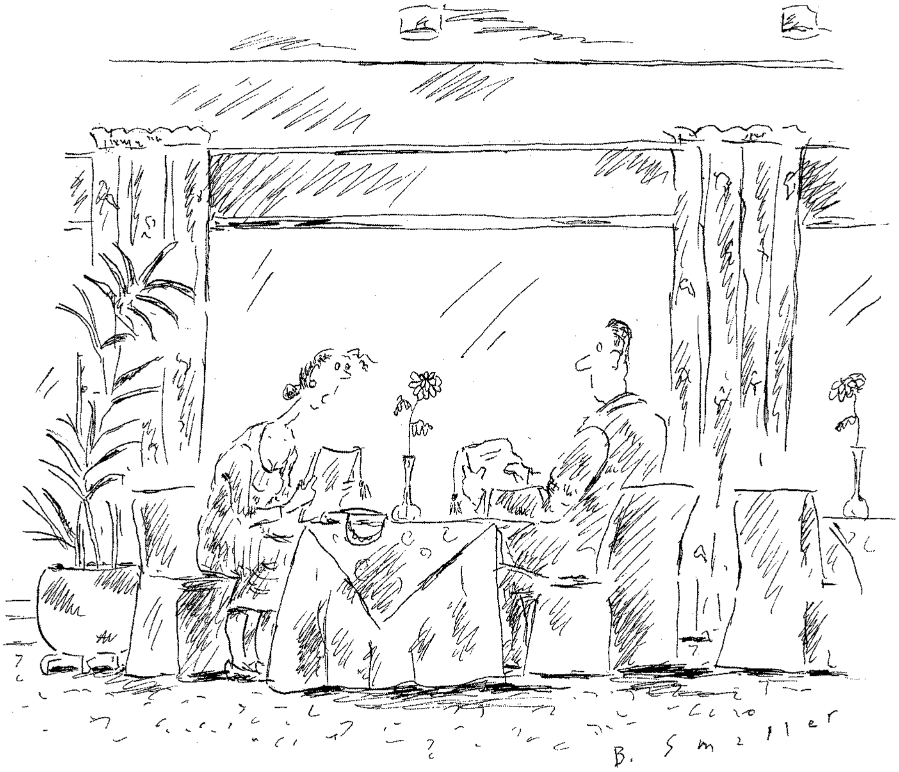
To a geriatrician, though, it *is* a medical problem. People can't stop the aging of their bodies and minds, but there are ways to make it more manageable, and to avert at least some of the worst effects.So Bludau referred Gavrilles to a podiatrist, whom he wanted her to visit once every four weeks, for better care of her feet. He didn't see medications that he could eliminate, but he switched her diuretic to a blood-pressure medicine that wouldn't cause dehydration. He recommended that she eat a snack during the day, get all the low-calorie and low-cholesterol food out of the house, and see whether family or friends could join her for more meals. "Eating alone is not very stimulating," he said. And he asked her to see him again in three months, so that he could make sure the plan was working.

Nine months later, I checked in with Gavrilles and her daughter. She turned eighty-six this past November. She is eating better, and has even gained a pound or two. She still lives comfortably and independently in her own home. And she has not had a single fall.

In the story of Jean Gavrilles and her geriatrician, there's a lesson about frailty. Decline remains our fate; death will come. But, until that last backup system inside each of us fails, decline can occur in two ways. One is early and precipitately, with an old age of enfeeblement and dependence, sustained primarily by nursing homes and hospitals. The other way is more gradual, preserving, for as long as possible, your ability to control your own life.

Good medical care can influence which direction a person's old age will take. Most of us in medicine, however, don't know how to think about decline. We're good at addressing specific, individual problems: colon cancer, high blood pressure, arthritic knees. Give us a disease, and we can do something about it. But give us an elderly woman with colon cancer, high blood pressure, arthritic knees, and various other ailments besides—an elderly woman at risk of losing the life she enjoys—and we are not sure what to do.

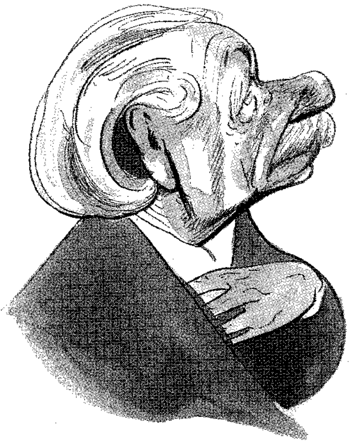
Several years ago, researchers in St. Paul, Minnesota, identified five hundred and sixty-eight men and women over the age of seventy who were living independently but were at high risk of becoming disabled because of chronic health problems, recent illness, or cognitive changes. With their permission, the researchers randomly assigned half of them to see a team of geriatric specialists. The others were asked to see their usual physician,



"Don't order anything that will embarrass me."

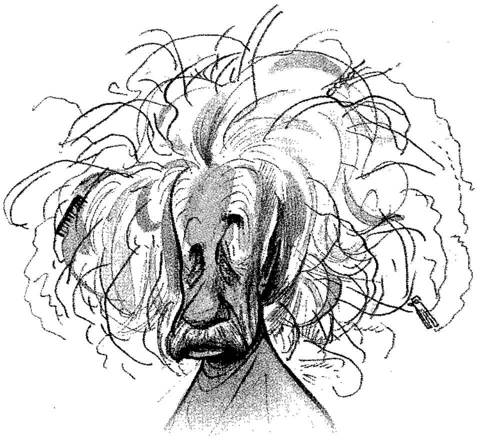
EINSTEIN'S RULES BY ANDY BOROWITZ AND STEVE BRODNER

Einstein's earth-shaking concept of general relativity is directly juxtaposed, in Walter Isaacson's confidently authoritative "Einstein: His Life and Universe," with a set of household rules that the great man wrote to keep his first wife at bay. "You will stop talking to me if I request it," this document asserted. "You will not expect any intimacy from me, nor will you reproach me in any way."—*The Times.*

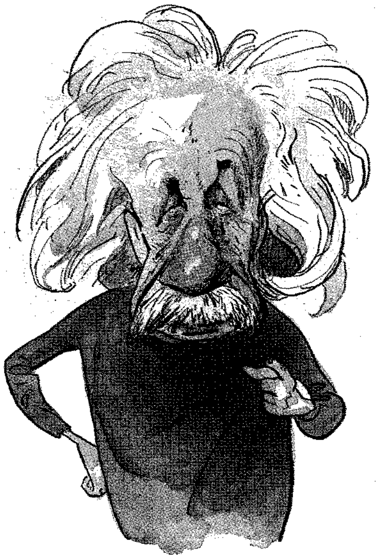


1. When I enter a room, you will address me as "Genius."

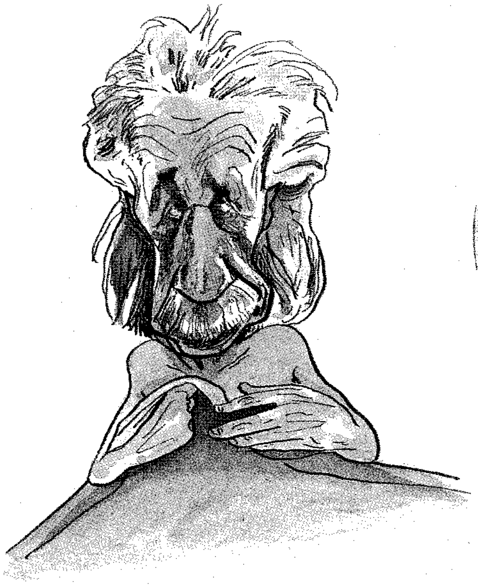
2. When you call me "Genius," you will be careful to do it in a sincere, respectful way, and not in the ironic, sassy way that is currently your wont.



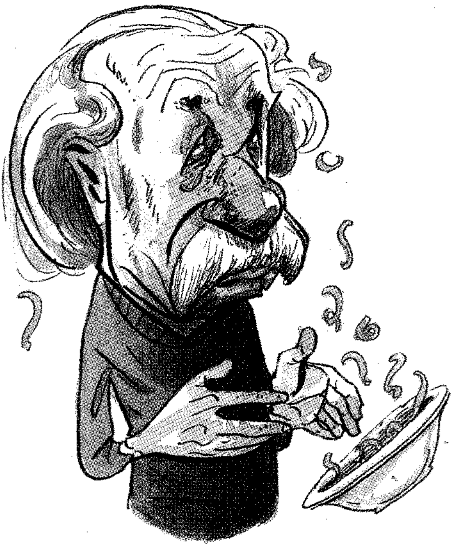
3. Three words that are no longer allowed in our house: "bad," "hair," and "day."



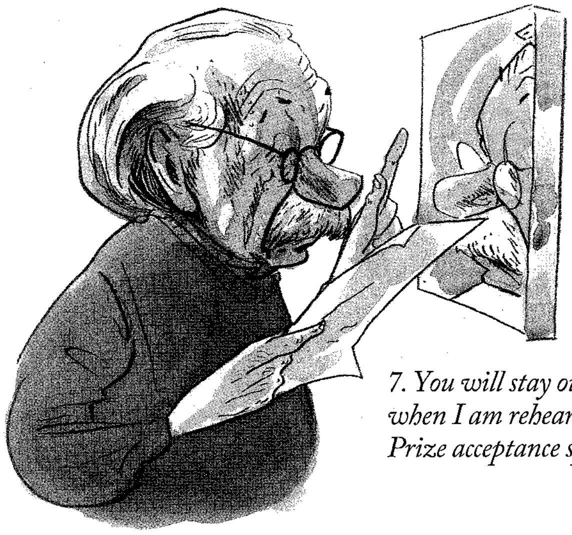
4. You will stop telling your friends that I am "not a rocket scientist."



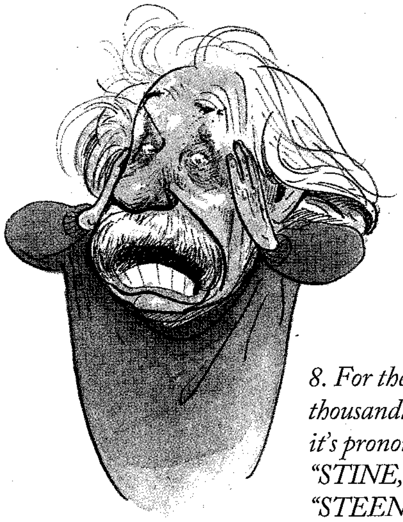
5. You will not expect me to make love to you. And on those rare occasions when I do make love to you, you will stop screaming out Linus Pauling's name.



6. You will stop calling me by my last name in a derisive manner, as you did last Sunday when I dropped a bowl of noodles on the floor and you said, "Nice move, Einstein."



7. You will stay out of the bathroom when I am rehearsing my Nobel Prize acceptance speech.



8. For the five-thousandth time: it's pronounced "STINE," not "STEEN."

who was notified of their high-risk status. Within eighteen months, ten per cent of the patients in both groups had died. But the patients who had seen a geriatrics team were a third less likely to become disabled and half as likely to develop depression. They were forty per cent less likely to require home health services.

Little of what the geriatricians had done was high-tech medicine: they didn't do lung biopsies or back surgery or PET scans. Instead, they simplified medications. They saw that arthritis was controlled. They made sure toenails were trimmed and meals were square. They looked for worrisome signs of isolation and had a social worker check that the patient's home was safe.

How do we reward this kind of work? Chad Boult, who was the lead investigator of the St. Paul study and a geriatrician at the University of Minnesota, can tell you. A few months after he published his study, demonstrating how much better people's lives were with specialized geriatric care, the university closed the division of geriatrics.

"The university said that it simply could not sustain the financial losses," Boult said from Baltimore, where he is now a professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. On average, in Boult's study, the geriatric services cost the hospital $1,350 more per person than the savings they produced, and Medicare, the insurer for the elderly, does not cover that cost. It's a strange double standard. No one insists that a twenty-five-thousand-dollar pacemaker or a coronary-artery stent save money for insurers. It just has to *maybe* do people some good. Meanwhile, the twenty-plus members of the proven geriatrics team at the University of Minnesota had to find new jobs. Scores of medical centers across the country have shrunk or closed their geriatrics units. Several of Boult's colleagues no longer advertise their geriatric training for fear that they'll get too many elderly patients. "Economically, it has become too difficult," Boult said.

But the finances are only a symptom of a deeper reality: people have not insisted on a change in priorities. We all like new medical gizmos and demand that policymakers make sure they are paid for. They feed our hope that the troubles of the body can be fixed for good. But geriatricians? Who clamors for geriatricians? What geriatricians do—bolster our resilience in old age, our capacity to weather what comes—is both difficult and unappealingly limited. It requires attention to the body and its alterations. It requires vigilance over nutrition, medications, and living situations. And it requires each of us to contemplate the course of our decline, in order to make the small changes that can reshape it. When the prevailing fantasy is that we can be ageless, the geriatrician's uncomfortable demand is that we accept we are not.

For Felix Silverstone, understanding human aging has been the work of a lifetime. He was a national leader in geriatrics for five decades. But he is now himself eighty-seven years old. He can feel his own mind and body wearing down, and much of what he spent his career studying is no longer abstract to him.

Felix has been fortunate. He didn't have to stop working, even after he suffered a heart attack in his sixties which cost him half his heart function; nor was he stopped by a near-cardiac arrest at the age of seventy-nine. "One evening, sitting at home, I suddenly became aware of palpitations," he told me. "I was just reading, and a few minutes later I became short of breath. A little bit after that, I began to feel heavy in the chest. I took my pulse, and it was over two hundred." He is the sort of person who, in the midst of chest pain, would take the opportunity to examine his own pulse. "My wife and I had a little discussion about whether or not to call an ambulance. We decided to call."

When Felix got to the hospital, the doctors had to shock him to bring his heart back. He'd had ventricular fibrillation, and an automatic defibrillator had to be installed in his chest. Within a few weeks, though, he felt well again, and his doctor cleared him to return to work full time. He stayed in medical practice after the attack, multiple hernia repairs, gallbladder surgery, arthritis that ended his avid piano playing, compression fractures of his aging spine that stole three full inches of his once five-foot-seven-inch height, and hearing loss. "I switched to an electronic stethoscope," he said. "They're a nuisance, but they're very good."

Finally, at eighty-two, he had to retire. The problem wasn't his health; it was that of his wife, Bella. They'd been married for more than sixty years. Felix had met Bella when he was an intern and she was a dietitian at Kings County Hospital, in Brooklyn. They brought up two sons in Flatbush. When the boys left home, Bella got her teaching certification and began working with children who had learning disabilities. In her seventies, however, retinal disease diminished her vision, and she had to stop working. A decade later, she became almost completely blind. Felix no longer felt safe leaving her at home alone, and in 2001 he gave up his practice. They moved to Orchard Cove, a retirement community in Canton, Massachusetts, outside Boston, where they could be closer to their sons.

"I didn't think I would survive the change," Felix said. He'd observed in his patients how difficult the transitions of age could be. Examining his last patient, packing up his home, he felt that he was about to die. "I was taking apart my life as well as the house," he recalled. "It was terrible."

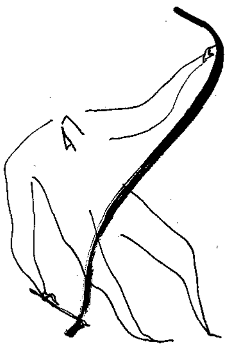
We were sitting in a library off Orchard Cove's main lobby. There was light streaming through a picture window, tasteful art on the walls, white-upholstered Federal-style armchairs. It was like a nice hotel, only with no one under seventy-five walking around. Felix and Bella have a two-bedroom apartment with forest views and plenty of space. In the living room, he has his grand piano and, at his desk, piles of medical journals that he still subscribes to—"for my soul," he said. Theirs is an independent-living unit. It comes with housekeeping, linen changes, and dinner each evening. When they need to, they can upgrade to assisted living, which provides three prepared meals and up to an hour with a personal-care assistant each day.

This was not the average retirement community, but even in an average one rent runs thirty-two thousand dollars a year. Entry fees are typically sixty thousand to a hundred and twenty thousand dollars on top of that. Meanwhile, the median income of people eighty and older is only about fifteen thousand dollars. More than half of the elderly who live in long-term-care facilities go through their entire savings and have to go on Medicaid—welfare—in order to afford it. And, ultimately, the average American spends a year or more of his old age disabled and living in a nursing home (at twice the cost), which is a destination Felix desperately hopes to avoid.

He tries to note the changes he's experiencing objectively, like a good geriatrician. He notices that his skin has dried out. His sense of smell has diminished. His night vision has become poor. He tires easily. He has begun to lose teeth. He takes measures where he can. He uses lotion to avoid skin cracks; he protects himself from the heat; he gets on an exercise bike three times a week; he sees a dentist twice a year.

He's most concerned about the changes in his brain. "I can't think as clearly as I used to," he said. "I used to be able to read the *Times* in half an hour. Now it takes me an hour and a half." Even then, he's not sure that he has understood as much as he did before, and his memory gives him trouble. "If I go back and look at what I've read, I recognize that I went through it, but sometimes I don't really remember it," he said. "It's a matter of short-term registration. It's hard to get the signal in and have it stay put."

He makes use of methods that he once taught his patients. "I try to deliberately focus on what I'm doing, rather than do it automatically," he told me. "I haven't lost the automaticity of action, but I can't rely on it the way I used to. For example, I can't think about something else and get dressed and be sure I've gotten all the way dressed." He recognizes that the strategy doesn't always work. He sometimes told me the same story twice in a conversation. The lines of thought in his mind would fall into well-worn grooves and, however hard he tried to put them onto a new path, sometimes they resisted. Felix's knowledge as a geriatrician has forced him to recognize his own decline, but that hasn't made it easier to accept.



"I get blue occasionally," he said. "I think I have recurring episodes of depression. They are not enough to disable me, but they are . . ." He paused to find the right word. "They are uncomfortable."

What buoys him, despite his limitations, is having a purpose. It's the same purpose, he says, that sustained him in medicine: to be of service, in some way, to those around him. He had been in Orchard Cove for only a few months before he was helping to steer a committee to improve the health-care services there. He tried to form a journal-reading club for retired physicians. He even guided a young geriatrician through her first independent-research study—a survey of the residents' attitudes toward Do Not Resuscitate orders.

More important is the responsibility that he feels for his children and grandchildren—and, most of all, for Bella. Her blindness and recent memory troubles have made her deeply dependent. Without him, I suspect, she would probably be in a nursing home. He helps her dress. He administers her medicines. He makes her breakfast and lunch. He takes her on walks and to doctors' appointments. "She is my purpose now," he said. Bella doesn't always like his way of doing things. "We argue constantly—we're at each other about a lot of things," Felix said. "But we're also very forgiving."

He does not feel this responsibility to be a burden. With the narrowing of his own life, his ability to look after Bella has become his main source of self-worth. "I am exclusively her caregiver," he said. "I am glad to be." And this role has heightened his sense that he must be attentive to the changes in his own capabilities; he is no good to her if he isn't honest with himself about what he can and can't do.

One evening, Felix invited me to dinner. The formal dining hall was restaurant-like, with reserved seating, table service, and jackets required. I was wearing my white hospital coat and had to borrow a navy blazer from the maître d'. Felix, in a brown suit and a stone-colored oxford shirt, gave his arm to Bella, who wore a blue-flowered knee-length dress that he'd picked out for her, and guided her to the table. She was amiable and chatty and had youthful-seeming eyes. But, once she'd been seated, she couldn't find the plate in front of her, let alone the menu. Felix ordered for her: wild-rice soup, an omelette, mashed potatoes, and mashed cauliflower. "No salt," he instructed the waiter; she had high blood pressure. He ordered salmon and mashed potatoes for himself. I had the soup and a London broil.

When the food arrived, Felix told Bella where she could find the different items on her plate by the hands of a clock. He put a fork in her hand. Then he turned to his own meal.

Both made a point of chewing slowly. She was the first to choke. It was the omelette. Her eyes watered. She began to cough. Felix guided her water glass to her mouth. She took a drink and managed to get the omelette down.

"As you get older, the lordosis of your spine tips your head forward," he said to me. "So when you look straight ahead it's like looking up at the ceiling for anyone else. Try to swallow while looking up: you'll choke once in a while. The problem is common in the elderly. Listen." I realized that I could hear someone in the dining room choking on his food every minute or so. Felix turned to Bella. "You have to eat looking down, sweetie," he said.

A couple of bites later, though, he himself was choking. It was the salmon. He began coughing. He turned red. Finally, he was able to cough up the bite. It took a minute for him to catch his breath. "Didn't follow my own advice," he said.

Felix Silverstone is, without question, up against the debilities of his years. Once, it would have been remarkable simply to have lived to see eighty-seven. Now what's remarkable is that he has the control over his life that he does. When he started in geriatric practice, it was almost inconceivable that an eighty-seven-year-old with his history of health problems could live independently, care for his disabled wife, and continue to contribute to research. Even today, most people his age cannot live as he does.

Partly, he has been lucky. His memory, for example, has not deteriorated significantly. But he has also managed his old age well. His goal has been modest: to have as decent a life as medical knowledge and the limits of his body will allow. So he saved and did not retire early, and therefore is not in financial straits. He kept his social contacts, and avoided isolation. He monitored his bones and teeth and weight. And he has made sure to find a doctor who had the geriatric skills to help him hold on to an independent life.

I asked Chad Boult, the geriatrics professor now at Johns Hopkins, what can be done to insure that there are enough geriatricians for our country's surging elderly population. "Nothing," he said. "It's too late." Creating geriatricians takes years, and we already have far too few. This year, just three hundred doctors will complete geriatrics training, not nearly enough to replace the geriatricians going into retirement, let alone meet the needs of the next decade.

Yet Boult believes that we still have time for another strategy: he would direct geriatricians toward training all primary-care doctors in caring for the very old, instead of providing the care themselves. Even this is a tall order—ninety-seven per cent of medical students take no course in geriatrics, and the strategy requires that the nation pay geriatricians to teach rather than to provide patient care. But, if the will is there, Boult estimates that it would be possible to establish courses in every medical school and internal-medicine training program within a decade. "We've got to do something," he said. "Life for older people can be better than it is today."

Boult and his colleagues have yet another strategy, just in case—a strategy that they have called Guided Care, and that doesn't depend on doctors at all. They're recruiting local nurses for a highly compressed, three-week course in how to recognize specific problems in the elderly, such as depression, malnutrition, isolation, and danger of falling; how to formulate a plan to remedy those problems; and how to work with patients, families, and doctors to follow through on the plan. In a test of the strategy, the researchers are putting the nurses to work in primary-care practices around Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and studying the results. It is a meagre solution for a huge problem, but it is cheap, which insurers demand, and, if it provides even a fraction of the benefit geriatricians have, it could nudge medical care in the right direction.

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"I can still drive, you know," Felix Silverstone said to me. "I'm a very good driver."

After our dinner together, he had to go on an errand to refill Bella's prescriptions in Stoughton, a few miles away, and I asked if I could go along. He had a gold 1998 Toyota Camry with automatic transmission and thirty-nine thousand miles on the odometer. It was pristine, inside and out. He backed out of a narrow parking space and zipped out of the garage. His hands did not shake. Taking the streets of Canton at dusk on a new-moon night, he brought the car to an even stop at the red lights, signalled when he was supposed to, took turns without a hitch.

I was, I admit, braced for disaster. The risk of a fatal car crash with a driver who's eighty-five or older is more than three times higher than it is with a driver between sixteen and twenty. The very old are the highest-risk drivers on the road. This past fall, in Los Angeles, George Weller was convicted of manslaughter after he confused the accelerator with the brake pedal and plowed his Buick into a crowd of shoppers at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market. Ten people were killed, and more than sixty were injured. He was eighty-six.

But Felix showed no difficulties. At one point during our drive, poorly marked road construction at an intersection channelled our line of cars almost directly into oncoming traffic. Felix corrected course swiftly, pulling over into the proper lane. There is no saying how much longer he will be able to count on his driving ability. The day may well come when he will have to give up his keys.

At the moment, though, he wasn't concerned; he was glad simply to be on the road. The evening traffic was thin as he turned onto Route 138. He brought the Camry to a tick over the forty-five-mile-per-hour speed limit. He had his window rolled down and his elbow on the sash. The air was clear and cool, and we listened to the sound of the wheels on the pavement.

"The night is lovely, isn't it?" he said. ♦

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE ANTI-MAESTRO

How Esa-Pekka Salonen transformed the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

BY ALEX ROSS

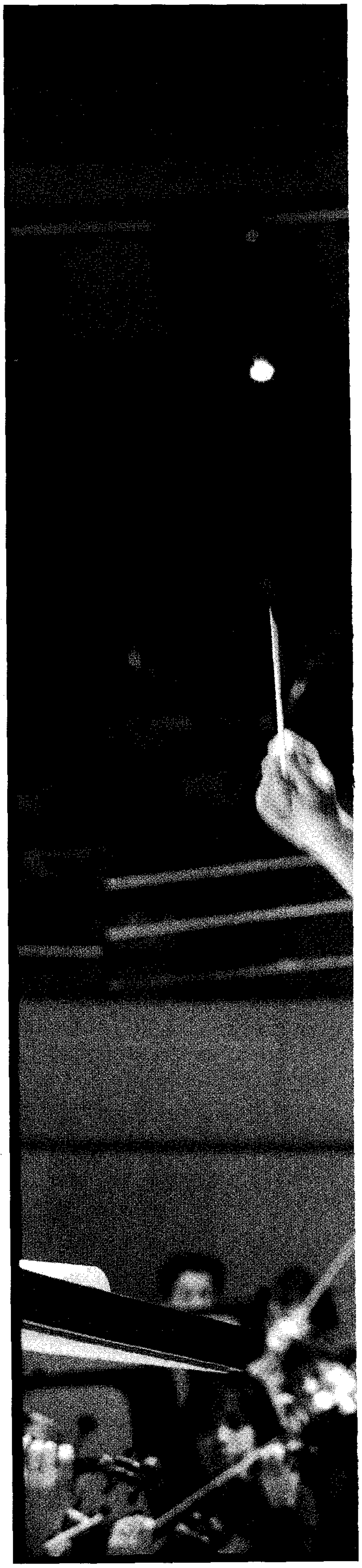
"I had this one morning—it was like a vision," the Finnish composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen recently told an audience in Los Angeles, at the end of one of those grand, warm Southern California days which you hope will never end. He was describing something that he had experienced not long after he became the music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, in 1992. "I woke up early, and my two little daughters were still asleep and so was my wife, and I saw the hummingbirds outside my window, and the sun was shining. And I felt this very strange thing. I couldn't quite know what it was. I went to the kitchen and I made myself a cup of coffee. As I was sitting there, I thought, Why do I feel like this? What is it? And then I realized that I felt . . . *free.* Nice feeling." Free, he explained, from the totems and taboos of modernism; free to investigate new canons in music and art; free to become himself.

Salonen was speaking at the Apple Store in Santa Monica. He had been invited there to discuss one of his recent works—"Helix," a dense, hard-driving, buoyant tone poem for orchestra—and the computer programs that he employs to notate and elaborate his ideas. More than a hundred people, ranging from longtime Philharmonic subscribers to college-age electronic-music enthusiasts, squeezed in among the iMacs and the iPods to see Salonen in person. He's an unusual kind of celebrity—a fixed point of cerebral cool in a city of spectacle and flux.

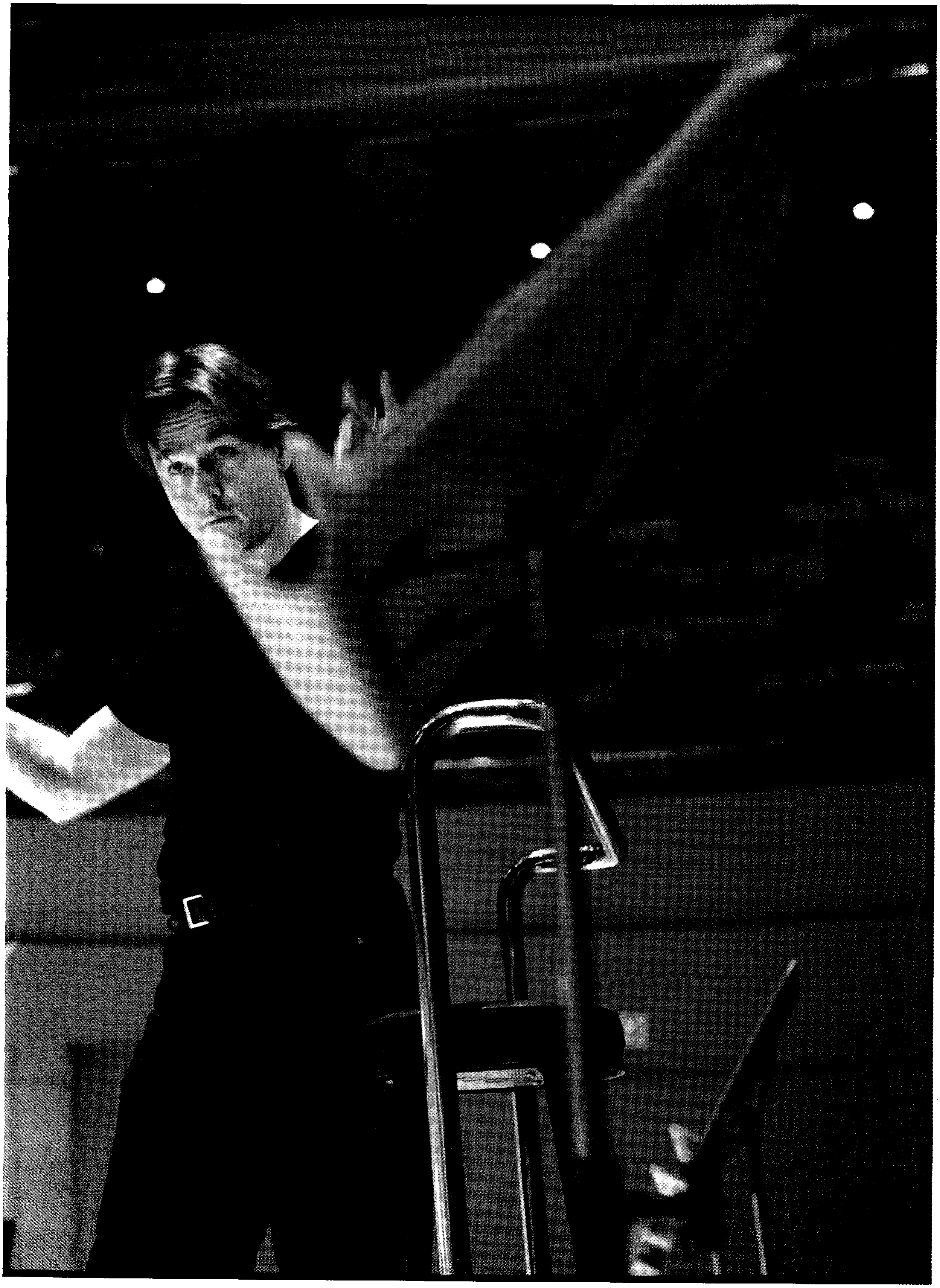
Commonly referred to in the Philharmonic offices as E.-P., Salonen is a short, compact man, preternaturally boyish in appearance. It doesn't quite compute that next year he will turn fifty. Some years ago, *People* offered him the opportunity to be one of its "Most Beautiful People"; he declined. A native of Helsinki, he speaks in a polyglot diction made up, variously, of the fluid singsong of the Finnish language, a kind of BBC-announcer plumminess, bits of various Continental languages, and an array of American idioms, some of them picked up from his daughters, Ella and Anja (who are now teen-agers). Reserved by nature, he is nonetheless a winning speaker, puncturing his maestro façade with deadpan jokes, whimsical digressions, "Who, me?" inflections, and a favorite facial expression of the cat-that-ate-the-canary type.

Salonen told the crowd about his first years with the Philharmonic. "I was then a little over thirty years old," he said. "And I was being given this orchestra to conduct. What other city would be prepared to do this—give one of the top orchestras in the world to some guy from Finland nobody has ever heard of? And yet they did that. And all along I felt this tremendous support. 'O.K., show us. Do something with it. Just run with it.' "

Run with it he did: Salonen proceeded to make the L.A. Philharmonic the most contemporary-minded orchestra in America. Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" became the center of the repertory, not the outer limit. Conductor and listeners met each other halfway, the latter opening themselves to new sounds and the former softening his modernist edge. In 2003, with the opening of Frank Gehry's silver-winged Walt Disney Concert Hall, in downtown L.A., the Philharmonic acquired the most architecturally striking and acoustically satisfying performance space of modern times. More good things followed: a festival called Minimalist Jukebox brought in thousands of new listeners, and Peter Sellars's production of "Tristan und Isolde," set to a full-length film by Bill Viola, remade Wagner's medieval tragedy as a ritual of watery immersion and purifi-



Under Salonen's direction, the L.A. Philharmonic has become both a museum of masterpieces and a gallery of new musical work. Photograph by Steve Pyke.



cation. (The "Tristan Project" returned to Disney last week, and will appear at Lincoln Center on May 2nd and 5th.) Flush with money, free of contract disputes, playing to near-capacity audiences, capitalizing on new technologies such as iTunes ("Helix" will be released online in May), the L.A. Phil has become that rare creature: a happy orchestra.

The one person who wasn't entirely content was Salonen. His main ambition has always been to compose. Although he has found time to write some notable works in recent years—his surprisingly extravagant, Romantically expressive Piano Concerto had its première with the New York Philharmonic in February—he has not felt as free as he would wish, his days still taken up with conducting, rehearsals, meetings, public appearances, and interviews. After a "Tristan" rehearsal on April 7th, with the strains of Isolde's "Liebestod" still hanging in the air, Salonen told the orchestra that he was going to step down from the podium in the summer of 2009, so that he could spend more time composing, and so that the players could have a fresh start. As he explained a couple of days later, "What I didn't want to see was that I'd sit on top of the orchestra like Jabba the Hutt and prevent every other life form from emerging." (This is the place to mention that the youngest of Salonen's three children, Oliver, is eight.) He will continue to conduct, though at a slower pace—in the season after next, he will take up a less time-consuming position with the Philharmonia Orchestra, in London, where his wife, Jane, was once a violinist—and he will retain a role, as yet undefined, at the Philharmonic.

The orchestra was still absorbing Salonen's news when Deborah Borda, the orchestra's chief executive, got up to make a second announcement. In secret consultation with the Artistic Liaison Committee, which consists of five Philharmonic musicians, the administration had selected as the orchestra's next music director Gustavo Dudamel, a twenty-six-year-old Venezuelan. In 2004, Salonen had served on the jury of a conducting competition in Bamberg, Germany, where Dudamel was among the entrants. After a performance of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, Salonen had called Borda to tell her that he had encountered a "real conducting animal," and that it might be good to engage Dudamel for a guest appearance in Los Angeles. Dudamel has conducted the Philharmonic twice in the past two years. With an eye toward finding Salonen's successor, Borda had asked the members of the orchestra to evaluate every guest conductor who passed through. Dudamel received almost entirely positive responses.

The announcement of Dudamel's hiring was made official at a Monday-morning press conference. Three nights later, in a hall thrown into darkness—the blue step lights glimmering like stars seen through the rigging of a ship—Salonen set Act I of "Tristan und Isolde" in motion. Like so many of his performances in the past, it was precise in rhythm and rich in timbre; few conductors give as clean a beat or have so acute an ear for combinations of sounds. But there was an unchecked heat in the playing that you didn't hear so often in the early years of Salonen's tenure, when his urge to control detail led to excitingly rigorous renditions of Stravinsky and Schoenberg and some emotionally constrained Mozart and Beethoven. Making wide, broadly curving gestures with the baton, he let himself be carried along by Wagner's music as much as he directed it. As he backs away from conducting, he gets better at it.

THE ROOM

The room has no choice.
Everything that's spoken in it
it absorbs. And it must put up with

the bad flirt, the overly perfumed,
the many murderers of mood—
with whoever chooses to walk in.

If there's a crowd, one person
is certain to be concealing a sadness,
another will have abandoned a dream,

at least one will be a special agent
for his own cause. And always
there's a functionary,

somberly listing what he does.
The room plays no favorites.
Like its windows, it does nothing

but accommodate shades
of light and dark. After everyone leaves
(its entrance, of course, is an exit),

the room will need to be imagined
by someone, perhaps some me
walking away now, who comes alive

when most removed. He'll know
from experience how deceptive
silence can be. This is when the walls

start to breathe as if reclaiming the air,
when the withheld spills forth,
when even the chairs start to talk.

—*Stephen Dunn*

The Salonen era in L.A. may mark a turning point in the recent history of classical music in America. It is a story not of an individual magically imprinting his personality on an institution—what Salonen has called the "empty hype" of conductor worship—but of an individual and an institution bringing out unforeseen capabilities in each other, and thereby proving how much life remains in the orchestra itself, at once the most conservative and the most powerful of musical organisms.

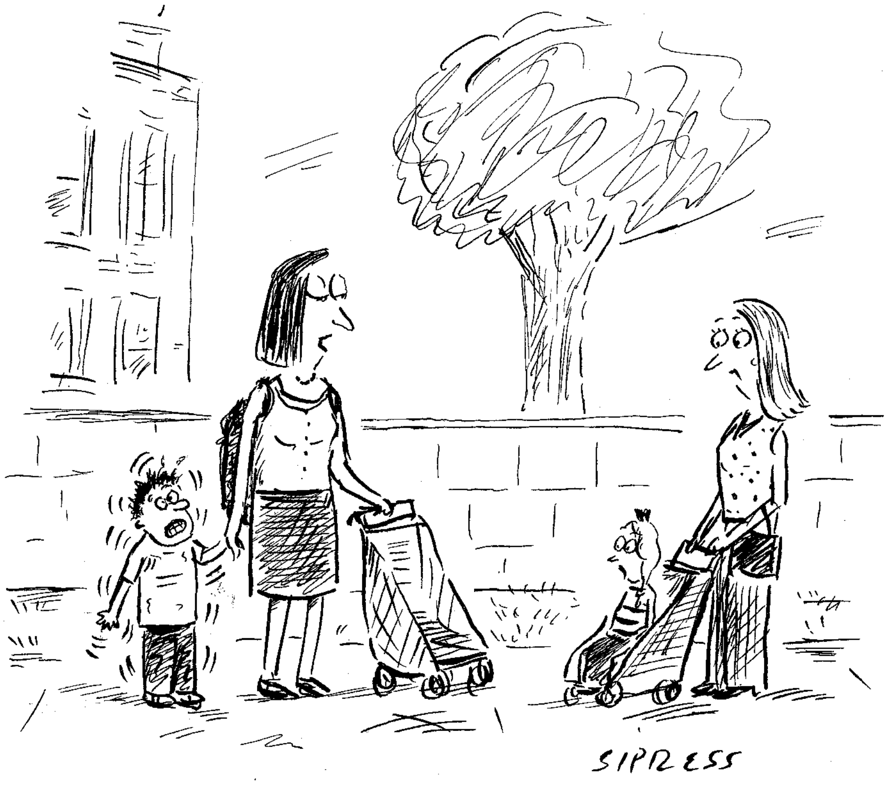
America has always been besotted with orchestras. Nowhere else in the world is symphonic music so canonized as an instrument of public edification and a symbol of civic pride; in the European capitals, the center of musical life has always been the opera house. At the turn of the last century, the great and the good of every Eastern and Midwestern metropolis felt it their duty to build an ornate concert hall, hire the finest musicians on the market, obtain a foreign-born maestro to lead them, and present concerts of beloved classics. For decades, these institutions perpetuated themselves with little change to the basic formula. The orchestra business expanded dramatically after the Second World War: where there had been dozens of professional orchestras, now there were hundreds. Cold War politics had something to do with the proliferation; John F. Kennedy's America was keen to prove that it could out-culture the Russians. Even now, the number of ensembles remains vast: nearly four hundred professional orchestras and some fifteen hundred volunteer, youth, and collegiate orchestras.

In recent years, many of these groups have had a rocky time. Audiences have grown older. Neighborhoods surrounding concert halls in cities like St. Louis and Cincinnati have emptied out and turned derelict. The multipurpose performing-arts centers that arose in the financially flush Cold War years have aged badly, their governmental façades often uninviting to the uninitiated. Despite the grim signs, though, almost all of America's orchestras have clung to life. Indeed, in the past year or two, many have reported a slight but hopeful uptick in attendance.

Some of the best news of late has come from California, which has never had much invested in the imitation of Europe. In 1995, Michael Tilson Thomas took over the San Francisco Symphony, which already had a reputation for innovation, and added to it his pinpoint musicianship, his eclectic taste, his gift for explaining classical music to novice listeners, and his knack for elegant spectacle. The first M.T.T. season closed with a joyous American festival whose programs ranged from Ives's "Holidays" Symphony to a Cagean improvisation by surviving members of the Grateful Dead.

The rise of the L.A. Philharmonic was a more unexpected development. For much of the century, it had been considered an ensemble of the second rank—"not too much more than a glorified community orchestra," one veteran player told me. It was founded in 1919 by William Andrews Clark, Jr., the son of one of Montana's Copper Kings. Clark was a skilled amateur violinist, a collector of books and manuscripts (including a formidable array of materials relating to Oscar Wilde), and an attentive companion to various handsome young men whom he had rescued from society's margins. In the nineteen-thirties, the Philharmonic achieved distinction under the august expatriate conductor Otto Klemperer, but the best orchestras in town belonged to the movie studios, where so many refugees from Hitler found employment. After the war, the Philharmonic subsided into an era of sleepy stasis, its finances in constant crisis. In the orchestra's archives, I found a forlorn report for the year 1963, showing a hundred-and-twenty-five-thousand-dollar deficit on a less than million-dollar budget.

The orchestra decided that it would have to take some risks. First, Dorothy Buffum Chandler, the wife of the publisher of the Los Angeles *Times*, raised money for what promised to be a splendid new concert hall, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Second, the orchestra appointed its first whiz-kid music director—the twenty-six-year-old Zubin Mehta. And, most important, in 1969 it hired as its managing director Ernest Fleischmann, who, at the age of eighty-two, remains an éminence grise of the Los Angeles scene. In the late sixties, Fleischmann was a hot-tempered revolutionary in the classical world, preaching the message that the modern orchestra could no longer run through the same old repertory for aging subscribers. It would have to become a more adaptable organism—a "community of musicians," Fleischmann said, able to perform new-music and chamber concerts, make



"I've got him on vibrate."

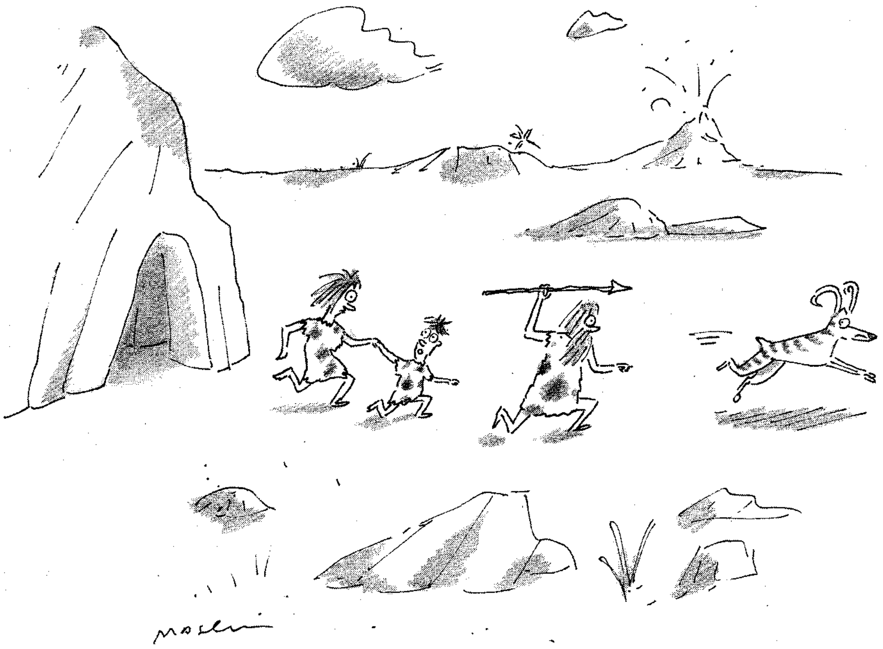
school appearances, and play all kinds of repertory. It would also have to submit to the will of a strong manager.

After a period of excitement, there was another tapering off. Mehta left for the New York Philharmonic. The Chandler Pavilion turned out to be acoustically deadening. Carlo Maria Giulini and André Previn had relatively short regimes. Fleischmann, who was born to Jewish parents in Germany and grew up in South Africa, saw the need for a second revolution. He would require another hall and another conductor, both of a new kind. “We don’t want a temple of culture—rather, a welcoming kind of place,” Fleischmann said of the projected hall in 1988. A competition was held, and the winner was Frank Gehry, at that time a much talked about but underemployed deconstructionist, who, in the seventies, had contributed modifications to the Philharmonic’s summer home, the Hollywood Bowl. As for the conductor, he would have to be a thinker as well as a virtuoso.

In 1983, on a flight from Marseilles to London, Fleischmann encountered an artist manager who told him that some Finnish singers had been raving about a young conductor with a funny name that he couldn’t remember. Fleischmann spent the night in London before flying on to Los Angeles, and while there he learned that a man named Esa-Pekka, obviously the funnily named conductor in question, had been engaged at the last minute to conduct Mahler’s Third Symphony with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

“This was a Monday,” Fleischmann told me at lunch, in his gravelly, courtly accent. “I had meetings scheduled on Tuesday with some L.A. City Council people—grant proposal, that kind of thing. We needed the money. Halfway through the plane flight home, I thought to myself that I had made a terrible mistake. I should have stayed to hear the Finn. I couldn’t ask the pilot to turn the plane around, so I went to my meetings on Tuesday and then on Wednesday I flew back to London. I heard Esa-Pekka’s performance of the Mahler Third, and I was totally blown away. I went around backstage to meet him, and there was this guy with a can of beer in his hand, in short sleeves, and I thought he must be all right.”

Salonen is characteristically wry when he recalls his first American visit, which took place in 1984, at Fleischmann’s invitation. “I was a very European product,” Salonen says. “By any measure, I was a piece of vintage Eurotrash.” After conducting the Philharmonic in a program that included Witold Lutoslawski’s alternately turbulent and transcendent Third Symphony, Salonen let himself be taken out to a club by a staff member. After standing in a corner, he mustered the courage to approach an attractive woman who was sitting at the bar. She asked what he was doing in the city. “Well, I just conducted the L.A. Philharmonic,” he said. “That’s the dumbest line I ever heard,” she said, and walked away.



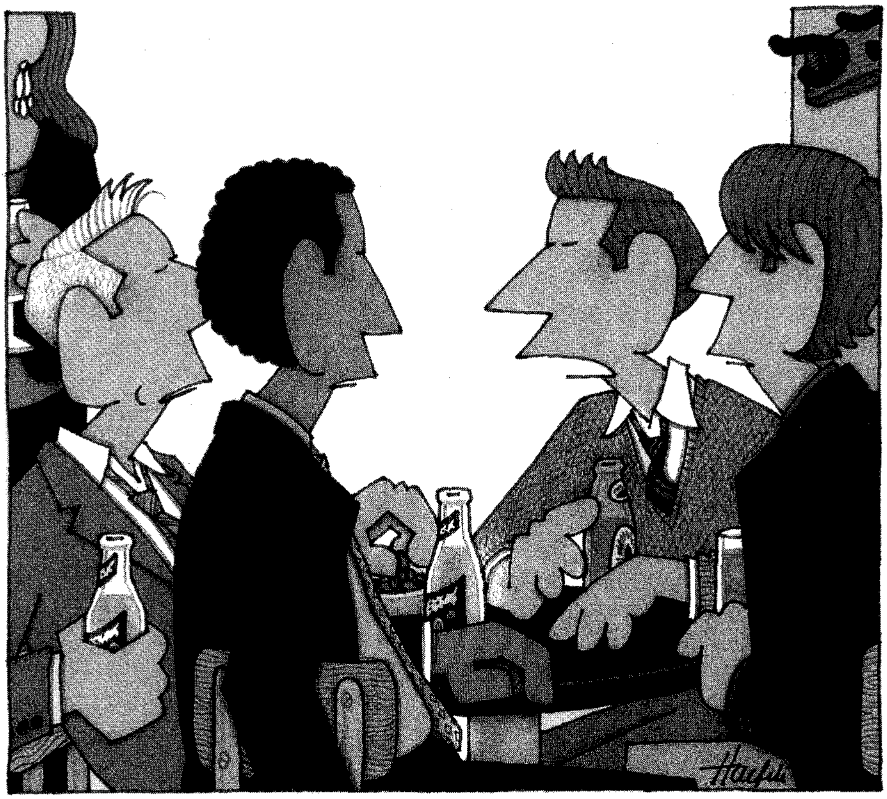
“Why do we always have to eat out?”

This is a familiar genre of Salonen anecdote, in which the protagonist assumes an attitude of self-importance and then collides with reality. “In one Presidential election in Finland,” he recently told a group of friends at dinner, “I was actually a write-in candidate.” He paused while eyebrows were respectfully raised. “I received, in fact, two votes, just behind Donald Duck.”

At his house, a white-walled, luminously modern place in Brentwood, he told me how the pianist Mitsuko Uchida once visited his home studio, which contains a Steinway piano that once belonged to the émigré conductor Bruno Walter. “Of course, I was very proud of this piano,” Salonen said. “And so I said to Mitsuko”—he lowers his voice the interval of a fifth and brings out the Anglo element in his cosmopolitan accent—‘You really have to try my piano. It used to belong to Bruno Walter.’ ‘Oh, yes?’ Mitsuko said. She sat down, played a couple of things, and stopped. ‘Esa-Pekka! Yuck!’ ”

These gestures of self-deprecation can go only so deep. Sheepish fellows do not become directors of major orchestras. Salonen’s cool sometimes shades into coolness, even steeliness. He avoids gushing enthusiasm—“Very good!” is high praise from him—and he can cause agitation in subordinates by saying something like “That’s actually not O.K.” and then falling silent. He lacks the American gift for filling in the holes in a conversation with reassuring blather, and one learns not to hear his silences as awkward pauses. He likes to cite an adage of his homeland: a Finnish introvert looks at his own shoes, while a Finnish extrovert looks at other people’s shoes.

Salonen was born to middle-class, music-loving parents in 1958. When he was four, his mother tried to get him to play the piano, and he “refused point blank,” he says, “because it was very clear to me that girls play piano and boys play the soccer.” (He has now revised his opinion: “Girls can play the soccer as well.”) He eventually started playing the French horn, because, an older musician told



"Lately, I've been channelling all my sexual energy into sex."

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him, it was easier to get into an orchestra as a horn player. But it was the experience of hearing Olivier Messiaen's sublimely over-the-top "Turangalîla Symphony," at the age of ten or eleven, that inflamed his desire to compose.

In the seventies, many Finnish composers were still writing moody symphonies in the spirit of Sibelius, although some had fastened onto twelve-tone writing and other advanced techniques. By the time Salonen enrolled in composition and conducting classes at the Sibelius Academy, the country's main music school, he was eager to preach the gospel of the difficult; at one point, he wrote a paper on "the defeat of tonalism," and once disrupted a school party by putting on an LP of Pierre Boulez's fascinating but thoroughly undanceable "Le Marteau sans Maître."

At the Sibelius Academy, Salonen fell in with a cadre of teen-age avant-gardists, among them Magnus Lindberg and Kaija Saariaho. They formed a collective called Korvat Auki!, or Ears Open!, and began putting on concerts of new music for the people, at which the people did not always consent to appear. One legendary evening, devoted to the Argentine-German conceptual composer Mauricio Kagel, drew an audience consisting of two elderly ladies who had come by mistake; another attracted a janitor, his dog, and the mother of one of the composers. Lindberg's gloriously cacophonous "Kraft" had its première on a bizarre program that also featured Teresa Berganza singing Handel arias. The mezzo-soprano was forced to sing "Ombra mai fù" while auto parts, office-chair legs, and other metal objects dangled on wires behind her, waiting to be banged in the noise symphony to follow. "Only the extreme is interesting," Lindberg would say. Salonen agreed.

The Ears Open! composers have since moved away from sonic extremities. Their music is now less hard-nosed, less dissonant, more lyrical, more spacious, although it hardly counts as easy listening. Salonen has devised a personal vocabulary in which he customarily uses hexachords, or scale fragments made up of six notes; when all six sound together, ear-cleansing dissonances can result, although he likes to tease out tonal melodies from the material. He revealed a lyrical bent in 1999, in a song cycle called "Five Images After Sappho," written for Dawn Upshaw. "Wing on Wing," a vocal-orchestral work from 2004, is a haunting evocation of the swooping forms of Disney Hall itself, and it incorporates recorded samples of Frank Gehry's voice. There's an amazing section toward the end of the score in which Gehry is heard saying "Go to the beginning," in a brief repeating loop, while drones and trills bubble up from the darkest regions of the orchestra. Salonen seems to have followed this instruction in several recent pieces, sculpting rough-hewn melodies and forms that give primal weight to fantastically sophisticated textures.

Just what role California has played in Salonen's musical development remains to be determined by his official Finnish biographer. (The composer claims to be approaching what he calls, in a rough translation from the Finnish, the "shitting deaf mute," or elderly-notable, stage of his career, and therefore requires a biography.) Certainly, his work as a conductor and his residence in Los Angeles have given him new influences. Pulsating, pop-inflected rhythms can be heard in "Foreign Bodies" (2001), which will be choreographed by the Diavolo dance company at the Bowl this summer, and also in "Helix." For a while, he listened to rock on his way home after concerts, letting his twenty-something drivers pick the CDs. He was deeply impressed by Radiohead's 1997 album "OK Computer," and once went out for drinks with members of the band. Like most thinking people, he admires Björk, although at the gym he prefers Shakira. While he admits that most other pop music either baffles or bores him, he remains open to the idea that a pop album could floor him as "OK Computer" did, and wants to unleash similar forces in his own music, a mixture of the brainy and the visceral.

Salonen is steeped in the culture of the Los Angeles émigrés—the throng of composers, musicians, writers, artists, and filmmakers who moved to neighborhoods like West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Brentwood, and Pacific Palisades in the thirties and forties. He can tell you exactly where Brecht lived, and Thomas Mann, and Rachmaninoff, and, of course, Schoenberg and Stravinsky. (Salonen once considered buying Stravinsky's old house, on North Wetherly Drive, but he was spooked by the fact that you could still see indentations on the carpet where the composer's piano had stood.) The émigrés fell into roughly two categories: those who Americanized themselves, such as Frederick Kohner, who wrote the novel "Gidget" and helped to codify surfer slang, and those who stayed aloof, such as Theodor Adorno, sitting in his house on South Kenter Avenue, and writing darkly of the interchangeability of totalitarianism and capitalism.

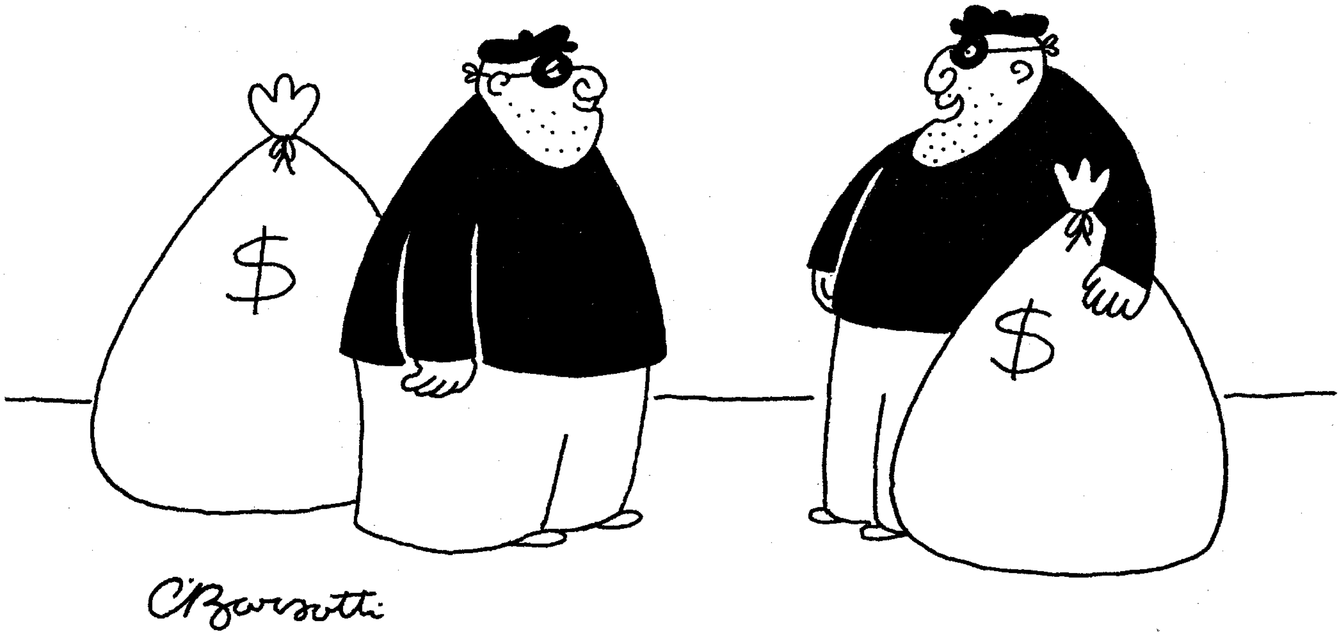
Salonen falls somewhere comfortably in the middle. His music elegantly threads together the aristocratic complexity of his European musical training and the blunt energy of his adopted city. Plain chords come up against seething textures; a melody surges in and floats away. His conversation follows a similar cultural spiral. In front of an audience at Disney Hall in January, he launched into a disquisition on Mahler's Seventh Symphony and Webern's Five Pieces for Orchestra; the progression from late-Romantic opulence to early modern austerity, he said, resembled the collapse of a giant star into a white dwarf. As he was unfurling this metaphor, he paused to note, "White Dwarf was actually what I was called on my school hockey team."

Salonen had his path mapped out from the moment he arrived in Los Angeles. When I first met him, in 1994, he told me, "There's this crowd who go to contemporary-art exhibitions and see art cinema—people who basically use their brains more than average people. But they don't come to classical-music concerts. It's a problem of perception. They don't see an orchestra as part of the contemporary art scene. It's not a conversation item in their circles, because symphony orchestras play Beethoven and audiences are eighty-five years old. Now people are realizing that the Philharmonic is moving into this century."

In the early years, the theory was more convincing than the execution. Players recall a withdrawn young man who was inaudible in rehearsal and difficult to talk to afterward. Insistent programming of thorny European works by Lutoslawski, Luciano Berio, and György Ligeti led to a drop in attendance. A couple of years in, members of the orchestra met with him and urged him to pay more attention to the subscribers' taste. If the usual story had unfolded, Salonen would have either caved in or gone back to Europe muttering about the backwardness of the Americans. Instead, he stubbornly persisted, although he became savvier about mixing old and new in his programs, drawing connections between the mainstream repertory and modern fare. He leaned heavily on what he called "twentieth-century classics"—pieces such as the "Rite" and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra—next to which a new piece by Ligeti or Lindberg or Steven Stucky, the orchestra's longtime composer-in-residence, made intuitive sense.

Gehry's new concert hall was crucial to Salonen's calculations, but for some years it seemed as though it might never be built. After ground was broken, in December, 1992, projected costs mounted into the hundreds of millions of dollars, and donors could not be found to augment the original fifty-million-dollar gift from Lillian Disney, Walt Disney's widow. (The Disney Company has no connection to the hall, nor do most major Hollywood players; the Philharmonic has long been the province of old-money families from Pasadena.) Fleischmann and Salonen pressed ahead. In 1996, Salonen told Mark Swed, the chief classical-music critic of the Los Angeles *Times*, "Somehow I've ruled out the option of the hall not happening."

Fleischmann retired in 1998. Two years later, following a confusing interregnum involving a Dutch executive, Borda, a diminutive, propulsive Manhattanite, arrived. Salonen had sought her out, and at first she seemed an odd choice. She was at that time the executive director of the New York Philharmonic, a wealthier and more conservative institution. "It was like being president of Harvard, which I did not at first realize was not necessarily a good thing," Borda says. She'd had an often combative relationship with Kurt Masur, who was then the orchestra's music director. Earlier in her career, she had thrived in offbeat settings, managing a new-music ensemble in Boston



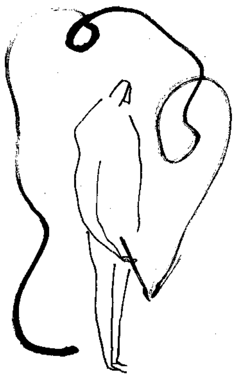
"Me, too—but it's a good tired."

and working alongside the composer John Adams at the San Francisco Symphony, but in New York she felt as if a box were closing in on her. "Esa-Pekka brought me back to life," she says. "This orchestra saved me."

Like Fleischmann before her, Borda is a formidable executive who runs the orchestra like a lean company, not like a flabby non-profit. She is aggressive when she needs to be, as she proved when she snatched Gustavo Dudamel away from a half-dozen orchestras interested in retaining his services. She has put the organization on solid financial footing. When it moved to Disney Hall, in 2003, it actually expanded its operations, posting a one-year sales increase of sixty-two per cent. The nightly sellouts of the first Disney season couldn't be sustained, but the Philharmonic still sells a very respectable ninety-two per cent of its tickets. It depends less on charitable contributions than most big-league orchestras do; seventy-five per cent of its eighty-four-million-dollar budget is derived from regular-season ticket sales and other income, such as the lucrative summer season at the Hollywood Bowl. There is a conspicuous lack of tension between the players and the management.

Yet, despite the on-message, on-budget managerial ethos, the L.A. Philharmonic remains an unpredictable place, still the most experimental of American orchestras. One crucial member of the staff is Chad Smith, a thirty-five-year-old native of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, who began his career as an operatic tenor of the fair-haired, dashing type and then took a sharp left turn into progressive music programming. He is now the vice-president of artistic planning, which means that he is in charge of shaping the programs and cultivating visiting musicians. "I spent a couple of years listening to Esa-Pekka," Smith says, "and got the sense that the thinking always needed to be bigger, not big in scale but big in imagination. That's how we started thinking about minimalism."

The Minimalist Jukebox festival, which Adams curated last season, was originally supposed to be a relatively conventional series of programs linking minimalist composers and earlier classical repertory—say, Steve Reich and Bach. But this seemed too boring for Disney Hall. What emerged instead was a two-week festival that ranged from classic minimalist pieces by Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass to post-minimalist works such as Michael Gordon's "Decasia" and Glenn Branca's "Hallucination City," a symphony for a hundred electric guitars. The series kicked off with an all-night show by the Orb, a British group that plays ambient house music. Subscribers fled en masse, exchanging their tickets for other series, but the empty seats were filled by new, much younger listeners. The festival came close to breaking even, despite the fact that some ticket prices had been reduced to accommodate a less genteel crowd.



Perhaps Borda's boldest notion is to give visiting composers such as Adams and Thomas Adès the same royal treatment that is extended to the likes of Yo-Yo Ma and Joshua Bell; Borda talks about "hero composers." A recent performance of Adams's monumental California symphony "Naïve and Sentimental Music" in the orchestra's Casual Fridays series—a shortened program in which the players skip formal dress and mingle with listeners afterward—drew a nearly full house. Borda's big-guns approach has invigorated the orchestra's long-running new-music series, called Green Umbrella, which Fleischmann established in 1982. In the early days, it drew modest audiences, but in recent years attendance has risen to the point where as many as sixteen hundred people show up for a concert that in other cities might draw thirty or forty. The Australian composer Brett Dean recently walked onstage for a Green Umbrella concert and did a double take, saying that it was the largest new-music audience he'd ever seen.

In the coming years, an ambitious series of festivals will define the orchestra's relationship to various American landscapes. Next season, Concrete Frequency, under the direction of the conductor David Robertson, will provide various sonic snapshots of urban life, from the steely modernity of Varèse's "Amériques" to the chaotic nostalgia of Ives's "Central Park in the Dark." Smith, who lives in a loft downtown and follows the city's alternative scenes, hopes also to include some yet to be determined combination of films, d.j.s, hip-hop artists, graffiti-art exhibits, krumping (a furious dance style from South Central L.A.), and, possibly, skateboarding. The following season, Dudamel will preside over a festival of music from North and South America, capitalizing on L.A.'s status as a half-Hispanic city. After that, Adams returns to direct a festival by and about California artists.

One area in which the orchestra has done less well is in promoting younger composers. Speaking at an education conference in New York in February, Salonen said, "Institutions tend to play it safe. They are less willing to commission a large work by a young composer. They don't want to take the risk. It's the same old names that keep being circulated all the time." This is precisely what any number of composers who are not Adams, Adès, Stucky, or a half-dozen others might say about the Philharmonic itself. As the "hero composers" idea takes hold, the orchestra might want to challenge its own philosophy by taking chances on twenty-six-year-old composers, as it has on twenty-six-year-old conductors.

The Philharmonic is trying to solve the ultimate mystery of the orchestra business, which is how to attract new listeners without alienating established ones. The core audience will always be longtime lovers of classical music who mainly want to hear symphonies of Beethoven and concertos of Rachmaninoff. Then, there are Salonen's "people who basically use their brains more"—who ought to be at classical concerts but usually aren't. To serve both audiences, the orchestra becomes, in effect, two institutions folded into one—a museum of masterpieces and a gallery of new work. A number of music directors in other cities—notably, Robertson in St. Louis, Robert Spano in Atlanta, Marin Alsop in Baltimore, James Levine in Boston, and Osmo Vänskä in Minneapolis—are moving in the same direction. Suddenly, it no longer makes sense to generalize about the hidebound attitude of the American orchestra.

As for the players themselves, their greatest resource is flexibility. The Cleveland Orchestra may still hold the crown for the most flawlessly polished sound, but no American orchestra matches

"Crazy busy—you?"

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the L.A. Philharmonic in its ability to assimilate a huge range of music on a moment's notice. Adès, who first conducted his own music in L.A. two years ago and has become an annual visitor, told me, "They always seem to begin by finding exactly the right playing style for each piece of music—the kind of sound, the kind of phrasing, breathing, attacks, colors, the indefinable whole. That shouldn't be unusual, but it is." Adams calls the Philharmonic "the most *Amurrican* of orchestras. They don't hold back and they don't put on airs. If you met them in twos or threes, you'd have no idea they were playing in an orchestra, that they were classical-music people."

One day, I followed Ben Hong, the assistant principal cellist, as he went about his daily duties. A shaggy-haired thirty-eight-year-old who commutes on a motorcycle, he has been playing in the Philharmonic since he was twenty-four. He arrived at the hall at 9 A.M. to coach two students in a studio in the building. One of them was working on Elgar's Cello Concerto, and Hong, after working through issues of bowing and phrasing, tried to get his student to think about the piece in terms of "lost innocence" and the legacy of war.

Just before eleven, Hong reported to the main floor of Disney to play a matinée concert. The program consisted of Brahms's First and Third Symphonies, under the direction of Christoph von Dohnányi, who was visiting for two weeks. "We'll sell some tickets," Borda said of this concert in advance. "Plus, it will be good for the orchestra. Christoph will pick everything to pieces, rehearse in great detail, go back to basics."

After the concert, Hong had lunch with a few younger players: Eric Overholt, who has been playing French horn in the orchestra only since the beginning of the year; Ariana Ghez, the principal oboist, who also started this season; and Joana Carneiro, the assistant conductor. They talked about the audition process ("It's pretty brutal, probably the most difficult thing you have to do as a musician," Hong said); the limits of a conservatory education (Ghez studied English at Columbia alongside music at Juilliard); and the intellectual excitement of playing new works such as "Naïve and Sentimental Music," which the Philharmonic has recorded for Nonesuch. Some orchestra veterans have never relished Salonen's favored diet of twentieth-century and contemporary fare, but the younger musicians tend to cite it as one of the main attractions of the job. Ghez noted that older listeners no longer run for the exits when a little Ligeti appears on one of the regular programs. Instead, she said, they have been trained to say things like "I guess you have to take it like a Jackson Pollock."

Hong has been thinking more deeply about the gaps in his conservatory training, and wondering what he might learn from other kinds of music-making. In particular, he's become interested in improvisation. After lunch, he drove up some twisting roads in the Laurel Canyon area to the home of Lili Haydn, a session violinist, singer-songwriter, and former child actress, who has been giving him guidance on how to improvise in a semi-jazz, semi-Indian style. This activity falls far outside his usual work with the orchestra, although it fits into the expanded mission of Salonen's Philharmonic, improvisation having a role in much avant-garde music after the Second World War and in quite a bit of alternative-minded contemporary work.

Hong joined Haydn in her studio, which was outfitted with wall hangings and antique lamps. There was a faint smell of incense. First, they worked on a track that will appear on Haydn's forthcoming album. She sang, "We all saw the water sweep the streets with the force that carried Noah." Hong played a doleful, arpeggiated accompaniment. Then the two improvised for twenty minutes or so over an Indian tamboura drone. Hong seemed hesitant at first, locking himself into a repeating figure or indulging in rapid up-and-down scales that seemed exterior to the mood.

"Find the magic in the intervals," Haydn told him. She urged him to take hold of a figure of two or three notes, bend it this way and that against the regular rhythm, and then savor the effect of adding one more note. Hong promptly took off on a moody minor-key flight that sounded a little like the cello lines in Sibelius's "Swan of Tuonela" and, for a minute or two, became lost in music of his own invention.

He said at one point, "After a few sessions, I'm hearing things in a different way. I am feeling the nuances of each note in a more intense way. It's like when I was growing up—they'd say that you must chew each mouthful of rice seventy-two times to really taste the sweetness of the rice. There's something to that. Sometimes in classical music that's lost. This has taught me to be more appreciative of each note."

Hong deftly related all this back to the Brahms he had played that morning. He launched into an exceptionally free, rich rendition of the grand chromatic line that soars slowly through the orchestra at the beginning of the First Symphony, giving each note a slightly different color and weight. He stopped at the topmost B-flat, letting the note float out over the canyon.

To spend time with a creative-minded musician like Hong is to realize that the effect of a conductor on an orchestra is easily overstated: the L.A. Philharmonic is the sum of a hundred distinct personalities. Salonen knows this as well as anyone; as a youth, he was skeptical of his future profession. "I had no great desires of becoming a conductor," he says. "In fact, I thought conductors were disgusting. I very much disliked this image of a conductor like Herbert von Karajan, riding a Harley-Davidson on an LP cover, conducting 'Ein Heldenleben.' I thought that was really bad. I still do, actually. I thought that conductors get so much attention for almost no reason and the really important guy, i.e., the composer, is the worst-paid one and the one who always stays in the worst hotel and is kicked on the head by everybody else, and I thought that was rotten. I still do, actually."

For several years, Salonen had been making semi-public noises about leaving the Philharmonic. He had set himself various goals—to move into the new hall, to find an artistic vision befitting Gehry's space, to elevate the orchestra's playing, to cultivate its financial health. "Bit by bit," he told me, "all this started to become reality." He had thought of stepping away after the opening of Disney Hall, but he couldn't yet give up the heady experience of conducting in that space. "I thought, This is too much fun. It felt like the harvesting time. There also was a new level to the relationship with the orchestra. I quite often felt as though they were reading my mind—they would do something just as I was vaguely thinking of it. A lot of warmth and good feeling on both sides." Still, even when he's on a break he senses the obligations of the job pressing on him—not so much the conducting itself, which comes easily, as the dozens of other issues waiting to be addressed. (His future position at the Philharmonia, a self-governing orchestra with a much smaller infrastructure, requires him to conduct and not much else.)

Last spring, while Minimalist Jukebox was unfolding in L.A., Salonen was in Paris, leading the world première of the opera "Adriana Mater," by his old schoolmate Kaija Saariaho. In Paris, Salonen started making sketches for a Piano Concerto, which the New York Philharmonic had commissioned from him. Work proceeded in fits and starts over the summer and through the fall, and the score was finally finished over Christmas. As he reluctantly stole away from his family into his studio, he felt more acutely the need to give up the directorship of the orchestra.

The concerto was written for the pianist Yefim Bronfman, one of Salonen's closest friends and a master interpreter of the concertos of Rachmaninoff. Salonen was determined to confront the legacy of the old-school Romantic concerto; he came up with a voluptuous, virtuosic piece, full of cascading double octaves, wide-spanning chords, plush impressionist harmony, and, at the end of the second movement, a certifiable Big Tune. At the same time, the musical language feels very up to date, full of bopping rhythms, trickily shifting beats, alarms and noises, malfunctioning machine patterns, and a fabulously eerie section that Salonen characterizes as "Synthetic Folk Music with Artificial Birds." In a lively program note, he connects that last episode to a "post-biological culture where the cybernetic systems suddenly develop an existential need of folklore." Despite such programmatic idiosyncrasies, or perhaps because of them, it's a convincing reinvention of the Romantic concerto, and Salonen's most assured work to date.

Bronfman had to learn the solo part in a few weeks, and initially he grumbled about its finger-twisting difficulty. (Subconscious feelings of guilt may have produced a cryptic dream that the composer reported having one night, in which Bronfman was falsely accused of the murder of the actress Helen Mirren.) Salonen conducted the première himself, appearing with the New York Philharmonic for the first time since 1986. The orchestra, which has been making deliberate strides toward being a more modern institution, was friendly and coöperative. The audience responded with more wholehearted

Gahan Wilson

"Mr. Harrison already sees you."

enthusiasm than is normal for a New York subscription-series première. An elderly couple was observed holding hands during the slow movement.

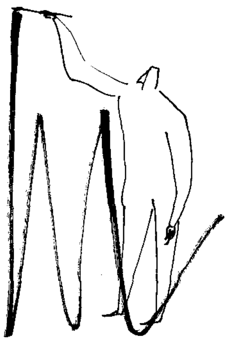
Afterward, Salonen was more confident about his choice to step down. “I felt that this is the way to go,” he later told me. “Now I’m ready for the next project.” He has long talked of writing an opera, and may finally go through with it. He is also planning a large-scale piece for chorus and orchestra, possibly based on Joseph Brodsky’s final poetry collection, “So Forth.” Some lines from the Brodsky poem “New Life” seem relevant: “Ultimately, one’s unbound/curiosity about these empty zones,/about these objectless vistas,/is what art seems to be all about.”

The Philharmonic players were keenly interested in the question of who might come next. “We’re cresting a wave—it’s just amazing,” Meredith Snow, a member of the viola section, told me in January. “The transition from Salonen scares us. But it feels like our management is really looking out for that.”

I asked Snow and David Allen Moore, a double-bass player, which conductors had made a good impression, and a relatively short list of names emerged. “There’s such a vacuum,” Snow said. “We’re so desperate for the quality of honesty. At least in this orchestra, there’s no baggage of people prejudging conductors. It’s, like, ‘Please be good.’ We’ll participate if you show us what you want, emotionally and musically.”

Dudamel’s name was the first one they mentioned. “He was great,” Snow said. “He has it all. This orchestra was on fire with him.”

Moore added, “It’s not just about a mythical being on the podium who by his own will makes everything somehow happen. It’s not so much about the cult of personality of the maestro anymore. Esa-Pekka clearly has a strong personality and all that, but with him it definitely feels more collaborative.”



Borda had observed how other orchestras underwent protracted searches for new music directors, replete with internal politicking for one conductor or another, speculation and second-guessing in the press, hurt feelings as renowned musicians were reported to have “not gone over well” with the players, and so on—all the result of the empowerment of musicians as adjudicators in recent decades. She decided to do a “stealth search,” gathering evaluations and reviewing them with the Artistic Liaison Committee. The musicians would have a say, only they wouldn’t quite know it.

Some players were already chattering excitedly about Dudamel’s future with the orchestra after his very first rehearsal as guest conductor, in 2005, at the Hollywood Bowl. “I was tempted to go for him right then,” Borda says. “But I wouldn’t do that.” Instead, over the next year and a half, she regularly travelled to hear Dudamel conduct, getting to know him and his wife, Eloísa, and commandeering his schedule with various projects. Somehow, she managed to do this without attracting undue notice from music-industry professionals. “I’m quite short,” she joked.

All this wouldn’t have mattered if Dudamel hadn’t won over the players when he returned to conduct in January, in a program of Kodály, Rachmaninoff, and Bartók. Halfway through the first piece, Salonen, who was sitting in the audience, leaned over to his wife and whispered, “This is the man.” The contract was signed at the end of March in Lucerne, where Dudamel was on tour. “We did it about two in the morning someplace,” Borda told me, relishing the cloak-and-dagger aspect of the operation. “I don’t think anybody knew, even with the crème de la crème of the European managers dancing attendance.”

Dudamel’s contract is for five years. “Someday he may go on to be the music director of the Berlin Philharmonic,” Borda says. “But I’m not going to worry about that. We have a tradition of people starting young, staying for a long time, and then going on to the next thing. Part of what we do here is we’re nimble.”

The incoming music director was born in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, in 1981. His father played trombone in a salsa band. He studied music from an early age, learning the basics of notation and theory before he took up an instrument, the violin, at the age of ten. He showed an interest in composition, and, at one of his early conducting gigs, at the age of fifteen, he led his own Trombone Concerto. Conducting quickly took over, and by his late teens he was leading ninety concerts a year with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra, the chief ensemble in Venezuela’s youth-ensemble system. Venezuela has a music-education system unmatched by any in the world; since the seventies, the composer José Antonio Abreu has been building up an organization called the National System of Youth and Children’s Orchestras of Venezuela, or El Sistema. There are now two hundred and fifty thousand students in the system. Abreu has managed to maintain support for his system through various regimes, including that of Hugo Chávez.

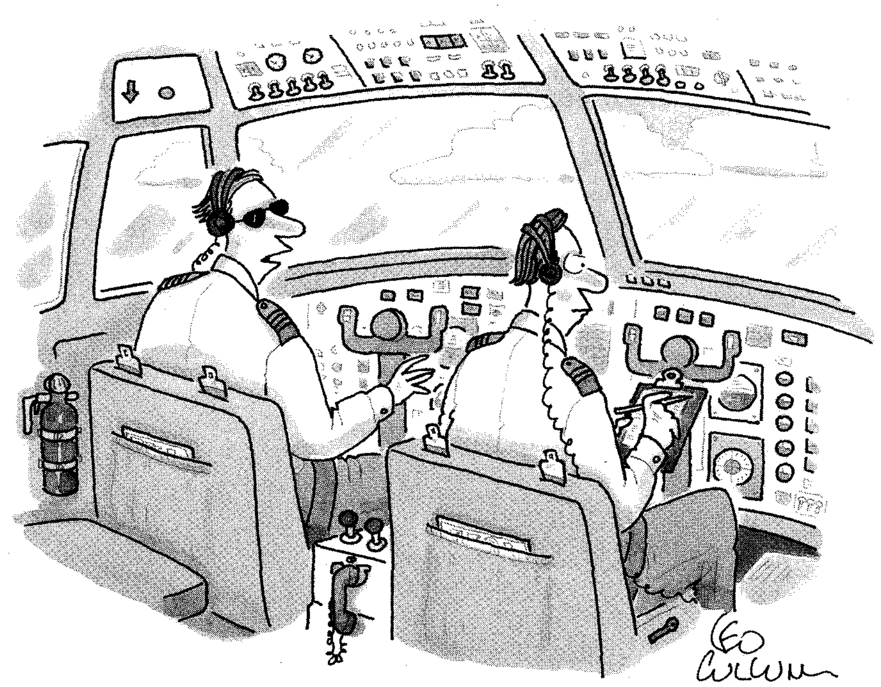
Having won notice at the Bamberg competition in 2004, Dudamel found himself in the tricky position of being hailed as a savior of classical music. It only added to the furor that he was a non-Caucasian face in an industry suffering from the appearance of élitism. Last year, Deutsche Grammophon recorded him leading Beethoven’s Fifth and Seventh Symphonies with the youth orchestra. My first reaction to the disk was skeptical; the interpretations were expertly handled, but there was nothing obviously extraordinary about them.

What the recording didn’t reveal was the electricity that crackles around Dudamel in performance. Just before his Philharmonic appointment was announced, he conducted a program with the Chicago Symphony that included Mahler’s First Symphony, and I stopped over on my way to L.A. to hear it. The conductor made smart choices throughout, managed tempo changes fluidly, shaped phrases with an idiomatic hand. At every turn, though, the players responded with unusual intensity, until the performance became an event. As Salonen told me, “He lets music be what it is, but somehow puts it on fire in some mysterious way.” Dudamel did not seem to be outside the music, imposing his ideas on it; instead, he appeared captive to it. During the coda of the Mahler, he jumped around with a boyish, Bernstein-like glee that would have appeared a bit ridiculous if you weren’t also hearing the majestic roar of the orchestra in front of him.

A huge ovation greeted Dudamel at Chicago's Symphony Hall. More than a few people in the hall—including members of the orchestra—may have believed that he could be their next conductor. In fact, he was about to fly to Los Angeles. Late the following day, he looked around the Disney stage and conferred with Borda in her office. The story had broken in the Los Angeles *Times* that morning, and people were already congratulating him; several of the guards offered greetings in Spanish.

Dudamel is a warm, exuberant young man, and he responded to every well-wisher with a torrent of phrases along the lines of "It is wonderful," "This is so special," and "I am so happy for this big opportunity." His English is not yet fluent, but he expressed himself gracefully, wittily, and, when necessary, with artful vagueness. He deflects questions about Chávez, apologizing for being "politically disconnected." When I asked him about his intentions with the Philharmonic, he said that he needed to gain more experience with the orchestra and its repertory before he could think about programming. He said that he had long admired Salonen. When he was eleven, his mother bought him the conductor's recording of Stravinsky's "Rite" and Symphony in Three Movements, and he was amazed to find such a "*very young* conductor" leading a major orchestra. "Oh, my God, who is this guy? From that time he was an idol for me." When Dudamel repeated that anecdote at the press conference, Salonen looked suitably embarrassed.

Most of L.A.'s television stations sent reporters and cameras, their coverage revealing that after fifteen years the local announcers still can't pronounce the music director's name ("Eessa-peeka," "Salanon"). The orchestra's press office fielded calls from the "Tonight Show" and Al Jazeera. Dudamel appeared healthily detached from the attention. At the press conference, when Salonen introduced him with an uncharacteristically florid fanfare—"We are interested in the future. We are not trying to re-create the glories of the past, like so many other symphony orchestras"—Dudamel got a laugh by advancing to the microphone, pausing for a long moment, and saying, "*So-o-o-o* . . ." The art of understatement isn't dead at Walt Disney Concert Hall.



"Whether I have five passengers or five hundred, I try to make the same inane announcements."

Afterward, Salonen sat in his office, a cool, quiet space within Disney's curving walls. He was looking for words that would express in a not too sentimental or clichéd way the idea that he had decided to take the plunge, follow his dream, reject the beaten path. "I'm approaching fifty," he told me. "And, going by the sort of ten-year chunks by which we measure our lives, even if I behave, the number of decades available is sadly limited. Bill Viola sent me an e-mail this morning saying that there is an old Bulgarian proverb: If you decide to kill yourself by drowning, don't do it in shallow waters."

Several times in the preceding weeks, Salonen had touched on the theme of growing older. At his Apple Store event, he had said, "At this point, my feeling is that somebody will conduct concerts, no question, but only I can write my music, for better or worse. And we're not getting younger, necessarily." In a radio interview, he proposed that people in their thirties and forties might be rediscovering classical music because "you realize that your time is not unlimited, that there might be an end to all this, and that life is too short to be wasted on things that are not quality."

That morning, Salonen had surprised his colleagues by showing up in a cerulean sports jacket. He habitually dresses in a black T-shirt and black jeans, and no one could recall him wearing color. This was an inside joke for the orchestra, he explained to Smith. At his first rehearsal as music director, everyone had dressed in black in homage to him, and, in those shoe-gazing days, he had to have the joke pointed out.

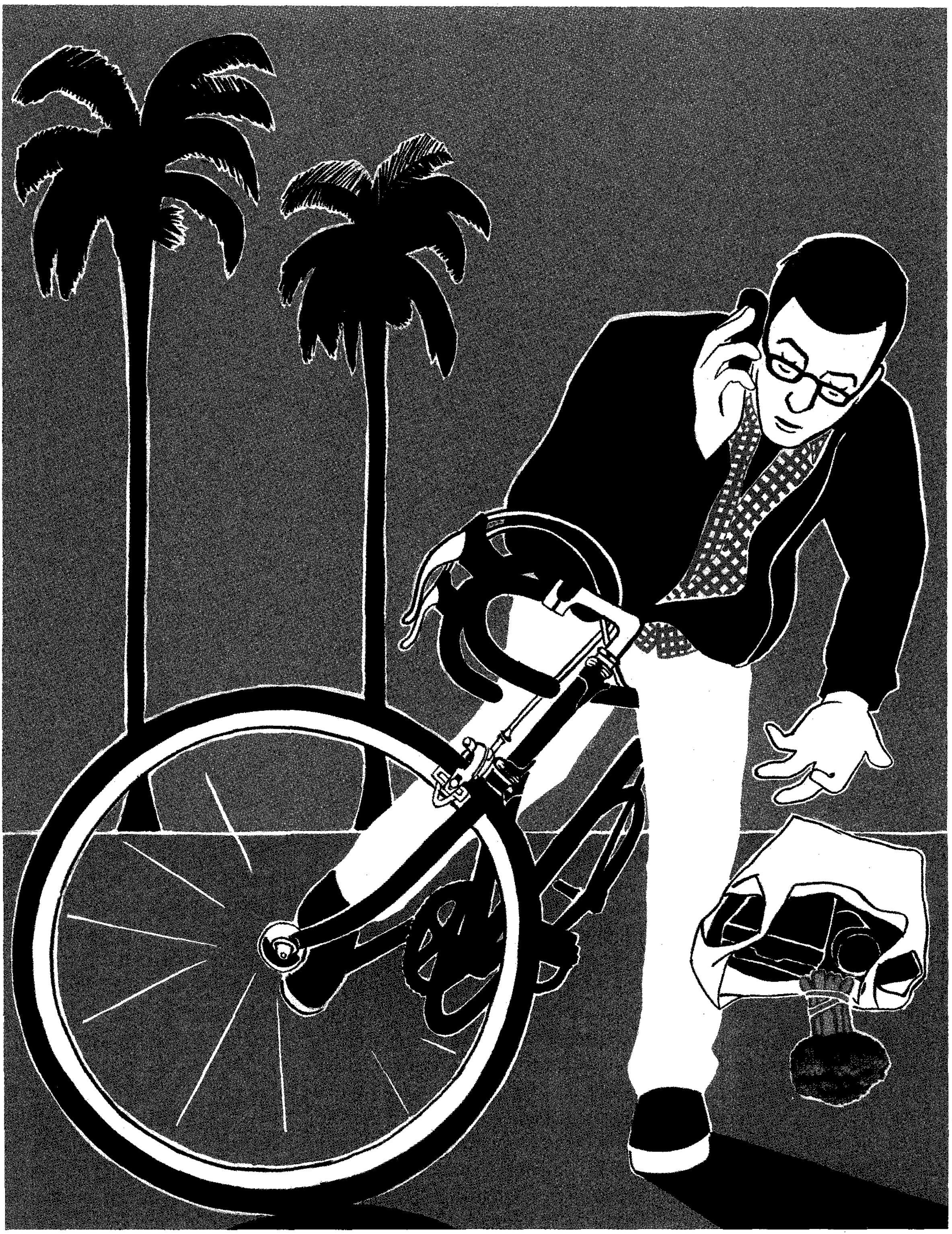
Salonen described what had happened on Saturday after he told the orchestra he was leaving. Drained by the experience, he sat in his office alone. (Ben Hong reported that the speech had been "really heartfelt, one of the few times he's been emotional.") Borda stopped by, and they shared a vodka. Then she went off to attend to business. As he was preparing to leave, his assistant buzzed him, saying that a small group of the musicians were outside the door. He invited them in and chatted for a while. There was another buzz: more musicians had arrived, fortified by a trip to a nearby bar.

"It became like a sort of mini-party," Salonen said. "I don't know what goes on in other orchestras, but it really felt extremely personal and extremely unique." Well into the evening, he finally went home to his wife and children, one more free man in California. ♦

FICTION

AFTER THE MOVIE

BY RICHARD RAYNER



Ed Vickery and his wife, Kate, came home late from the movies. They'd seen that big hit about ancient-Greek guys making a last stand against the Persian hordes. Ed's mind had been elsewhere, however, with the I.R.S. and dodgy A.R.M.s, not severed heads in C.G.I. He felt flat, exhausted. His back hurt. His athlete's foot itched. The rich, sickly smell of night-flowering jasmine swamped his lungs, and all of a sudden he had trouble breathing.

"You're in a lousy mood, and you should go to bed," Kate said, and Ed grunted.

"I'll do that," he said, but before he did he looked in on the boys. Luke and Denis, twelve and ten now, had been only too happy to be left without the babysitter that Ed could no longer afford. They'd watched a couple of DVDs, scarfed a tub of Ben & Jerry's, probably forgotten to brush their teeth (for sure, in Denis's case), and were busy feigning sleep. From one side of the room, Ed heard a suppressed giggle, from the other a silence that was too deep to be genuine. He went along with the game. In truth, he couldn't face talking to his children. He said nothing, not even the usual "Good night, lads," and pulled the door closed with a soft click. He brushed his teeth, showered quickly, and, while Kate was opening her laptop on the kitchen table, went to their bedroom, at the back of the house. He slipped on a pair of boxers, clambered beneath the covers, and started to weep. Here it comes, Ed thought. The Great Flood. Another one. His face screwed up. His chest was shaken by sobs. He knew he made a comical picture, a middle-aged man, still slim, with a full head of graying hair, sitting up in bed, letting himself go, blubbering, wailing, indulging in wild, spontaneous woe. He was beyond worrying about it. He didn't feel like being spartan or stoic, or whatever. Instead, he surrendered to the full tsunami of his anxious terror. Hot tears gushed from his eyes, spangling the beam of the bedside lamp into rainbows, coursing down his cheeks, touching his lips with a salty taste, and splashing the yellowed pages of the book he hadn't been aware he'd taken from the shelf, a collection of stories by Ivan Bunin, one of those writers he'd been meaning to get to for years.

STEVE POWERS

"The weird thing," Ed said to himself, thinking of his friend Muldoon, "is that once I held your hand and told you not to give up."

This was true. Years ago, Muldoon, tortured in love and with his career in disarray, had been the one on the skids and flailing. Now it was Ed's turn.

"And it's different when you're fifty," Ed said, choking back a sob. "I'm a fucking dead man."

Muldoon was a movie director. His small films were nominated for Oscars these days. His big ones grossed three hundred million worldwide. Muldoon no longer flew commercial, not even in first class, but soared above the roof of the world in private jets provided by the studio. He was on first-name terms with air-traffic controllers at J.F.K. and Charles de Gaulle. Muldoon was unassailable. Until a little while ago, his career and Ed's had been on a par. They'd been comrades and peers. But things had changed.

Ed was a writer. Used to be a writer, until his life started reverberating to the sound of doors slamming. Now he was a worrier, a weeper, a specialist only in the art of freestyle distress. He'd never been clever about money, but he'd always been able to earn it. Not anymore. His failed novels hit the remainder bins. Editors ignored his calls. And the teat of Hollywood had turned mean and dry. Ed's scripts were unmade, his treatments ignored, his options no longer picked up. One producer was currently paying him not in cash but in unsliced Finnish rye bread shipped via Vermont. "I don't want Luke and Denis to go hungry," the producer said, uncannily remembering the boys' names. Was this a fiendish joke or a sadistic gambit? Or did the guy, maybe, think the gesture was kind and would be appreciated? The loaf arrived weekly, resembling gold only in its bricklike weight. Ed's revolving credit cards were maxed out. He'd been using the house like an A.T.M. He tried not to think about the mortgage. The low five-year interest rate, such an attractive idea five years ago, was about to expire, and spike. They'd lose their home. He saw no way to keep it. The prospect woke him nights in a flop sweat. It seemed to Ed that his world had changed in some awful and perhaps final way.

"I'm at the end of my rope," Ed announced to the empty room. To nail the point, he hurled the Bunin book against the wall and watched while it fluttered earthward like a stricken bird. "I am a fucking corpse."

Ed thought often of suicide, of checking into a Las Vegas hotel room and finishing himself off in some spectacular way, slitting his throat in a tub or spattering his brains with a pistol shot. Trouble was, Kate would be left with nothing. Then, there were the boys, old enough to sense that all was not well with Dad but still laughing at his jokes, loving him, depending on him.

"Let them fend for themselves," he said. "They can starve, for all I care."

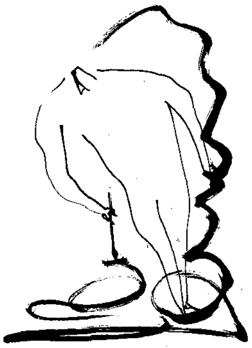
The anger released some juices and perked him up. He remembered that once he'd seen Muldoon, in a dark moment, slap a smaller member of the burgeoning Muldoon brood. How many kids did Muldoon now have? Nine, or was it ten? Muldoon seemed to average two per marriage, and he was into his fourth marriage. "Way to go, Muldoon, way to treat the awful little buggers!"

Muldoon had called him from Amsterdam earlier that day. It had been late in the California afternoon, three in the morning Dutch time. Muldoon had been on a night shoot, between takes on his latest action thriller. Ed—an Englishman who didn't drive in L.A., a peculiarity understood by nobody, least of all Ed himself—had been wobbling back from Albertsons, a bag of groceries suspended from each side of his bike's handlebars. He'd lurched almost into the path of a BMW while scrambling to retrieve the warbling cell from his jeans pocket.

"Hello! Hello!"

Would this be his agent, with news of a gig, a miracle? No. It had been Muldoon.

"It's the fucking writer. His name is *James*," Muldoon had said, dispensing as usual with the preliminaries, success having freed up his always considerable admiration for role models like Napoleon and Stanley Kubrick. On his Berkshire estate, Muldoon liked to patrol the legions of trees he'd planted to guard his marijuana plants from prying eyes. "I've done him the synopsis. Done him the beat sheets. Done most of the bloody work, in other words, but still James won't write my scenes. Know what he said?"



By then Ed had heaved himself and his bike up onto the curb, where, with one hunched shoulder jamming the cell phone toward his ear, he'd failed to save a stalk of broccoli that had tumbled from an Albertsons bag and plopped down on the sidewalk, perilously close to a pile of dog shit.

"James said, 'Writing. It's hard.' Can you fucking believe it? He said he was going to fly to New York for the weekend. To recharge his batteries. Stock up on some inspiration. I said, 'Fuck that, James. The only place you're going is *back to the hotel.* To write my fucking scenes.' Know what happened then?"

Muldoon's voice rose in sincere outrage.

"Check this out. Bastard did go to the hotel. And two hours later he was on set again, with these two girls. Preposterously young Dutch totty. Miniskirts up to their fannies. And there was *James*, squiring them about like he owned the fucking place."

For a few wild, deluded seconds, Ed allowed himself to wonder whether Muldoon had fired the miscreant James and was about to ask him to come to Amsterdam—because, of course, it was Muldoon, the director, the supremo, who owned the place.

"I said, 'James, what the fuck is going on?' He said, 'I met them in the hotel night club.' He did go back to the hotel, you see, like I'd told him to, and he went to the fucking night club. 'They wanted to see the set,' he said, 'so I brought them out.' I said, 'James! Did there *have* to be two?' A hundred and twenty-five grand a week the studio's paying this lazy sod, and I still don't have my fucking scenes."

Ed reeled. "A hundred and twenty-five grand!"

"Dollars, not quid."

"Jesus! Just give me a week of that," Ed said, trying to sound casual.

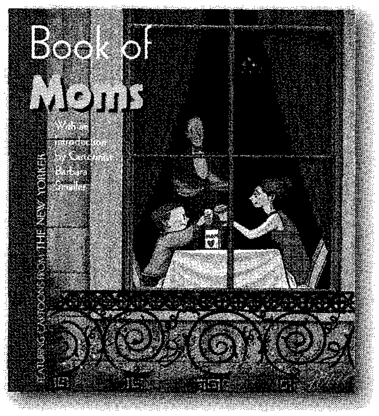
"Nah, you'd fucking hate it, mate," Muldoon said, as if Ed really had been joking. Muldoon had power, and people dogged him for favors. He expected Ed not to do that. He relied on Ed's not doing it, the unchanged nature of their friendship being important to Muldoon's sense of the whole story of his life. Muldoon had survived, prospered. Reclaimed, resurgent, Muldoon now needed Ed at the other end of the line to assure him of the fiction that they were no different. They'd met thirty years before, playing football—soccer, as the Americans insisted on calling it—slogging through the rain and freezing mud, chests out against the chill winds that gusted from Siberia across the desolate flatlands of eastern England. They'd been at university together. They'd sported on the green.

"That fucking James. He does make me laugh," Muldoon said. "United are doing great, aren't they? Read anything good lately?"

Ed had been unable to say, "Listen, I'm desperate, I can't stop crying, I can't do this anymore." Muldoon, with his astute generalship, his instincts for self-protection, his radar attuned to the mood and ping of dialogue, had headed him off at the pass. Abuzz with shame and humiliation, Ed had gritted his teeth and regrouped his groceries. He'd retrieved the broccoli stalk and lifted it to his nostrils. Could he save this? It didn't *smell* of dog shit, or no worse, anyway, than when he'd taken it off the refrigerated shelf in the store. He'd talked carelessly to his old friend about Ivan Bunin.

"Yeah, I read something by him once," Muldoon had said. "That famous story about the bloke dying abroad. They stick him in a crate and shove him in the hold of a ship to take him home. Quite spooky, really."

There was this thing about Muldoon: he knew movies, his craft, but he read everything, too. Muldoon was,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in his eccentric and loopy way, tireless and a bit of a genius. Ed wished he could say the same for himself. Instead, he was on a filthy L.A. sidewalk, worrying about broccoli.

"Great goal by Michael Carrick against Roma the other night," Muldoon had said, signing off. "The *first* one. Magnificent!"

Ed wiped his eyes and blew his nose. He clambered out of bed and retrieved the book from where he'd thrown it. He smoothed the cover, which showed a neat, bearded man with his face in shadow. Bunin. Hadn't he fled the Nazis and killed himself? Or was that Walter Benjamin? Ed's memory was getting sketchy. Probably they'd both topped themselves. Most people died in exile, one way or another.

Wearily, Ed hitched up his boxers and padded to the bathroom. He needed to piss so often now, his prostate having swollen in recent years to the size of a fist. At least he wouldn't have to hear about that anymore, the Writers Guild health insurance having run out. His prostate could grow without fear of medical supervision or intervention. Muldoon was right. Life was a farce. But Ed felt sure that his own particular version of the commedia would be *finita* all too soon. He was a beast being shuffled across the threshold of the slaughterhouse. How had this disaster happened? All those millions of words he'd written, all the forests of newsprint—they'd somehow amounted to nothing.

Kate was still in the kitchen, seated in the breakfast nook, surrounded by books and CDs that she was listing for sale on eBay, trying to keep some cash trickling in. She was testy with Ed, and small wonder, but she refused to give up. She was amazing, still beautiful. Ed took a knife from the magnetic rack and cut into one of the Finnish loaves. The rye bread was thick and moist, like cake, and Ed dropped a couple of slices in the toaster.

"Muldoon called today. From Amsterdam. I told him we were going to see the Greek movie. He said it was crap."

"Afraid it will make more money than his new one, probably," Kate said.

"He was complaining about his writer. The production rewrite guy who's being paid a hundred and twenty-five grand a week to do bugger all."

"And?" Her question hung out there for a moment, Kate being in the business of believing that something, maybe even in the shambling, looming shape of Muldoon, would turn up.

"Just that. Nothing more."

She hid whatever disappointment she might have felt. "He was checking that you're O.K.," she said.

"Why would he worry?"

Kate's eyes regarded him coolly. "Muldoon cares for you."

"Sure he does. He'll speak movingly at my funeral."

"Don't talk like that," Kate said. "He *loves* you."

Ed knew that she was probably right. He was thinking of the time, years before, when Muldoon himself, weeping, had seen no way forward. Ed had taken Muldoon's hands and stroked his forehead, telling him he must walk toward the light. "Don't give me that fucking New Age bullshit," Muldoon had said, but he'd laughed.

Ed smiled at the memory. With regret he found that something like hope was flooding his heart; at this point the despair was almost easier to deal with. "Oh, heck," he said, tears springing to his eyes. He was starting again.

"What?"

"It's nothing."

The rye bread popped up in the toaster. Ed took out the hot slices and buttered them slowly. Though Kate tried to be resolute, his panic sometimes infected her. And that wasn't right. She was his best girl. "It's Ivan Bunin," he said, noticing on the countertop the book that had travelled with him from bedroom to bathroom to kitchen. What had Muldoon said about that one story, "The Gentleman from San Francisco"? "It's about death, matey, about the indifference of death, about how you die, and death, basically, doesn't give a shit."

Ed stopped his crying and suddenly shivered, as if a nameless vessel, carrying his own corpse, had just passed. "Here," he said, handing Kate the book. "Sell this. Should bring a few bucks." ♦

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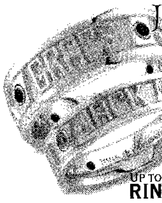

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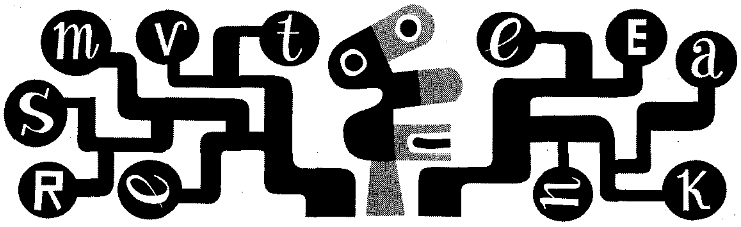


EDWARD SOREL

BOOKS

FAMOUS AIMEE

The life of Aimee Semple McPherson.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

The name of Aimee Semple McPherson resonates faintly now—a rather comical run of syllables compounded of a first name bestowed by a rapt young mother, Minnie Kennedy, in an Ontario farmhouse in 1890, and the last names of Aimee's first two husbands, Robert Semple and Harold McPherson. Yet in the nineteen-twenties and thirties she was one of the most famous women in America—for a time, the most famous, according to one biographer. After running away from her second husband, in 1915, she became a full-time revival preacher, in a white dress and a military cape. She not only preached, she healed, having herself experienced a broken ankle and torn ligaments abruptly repaired by prayer. She wrote:

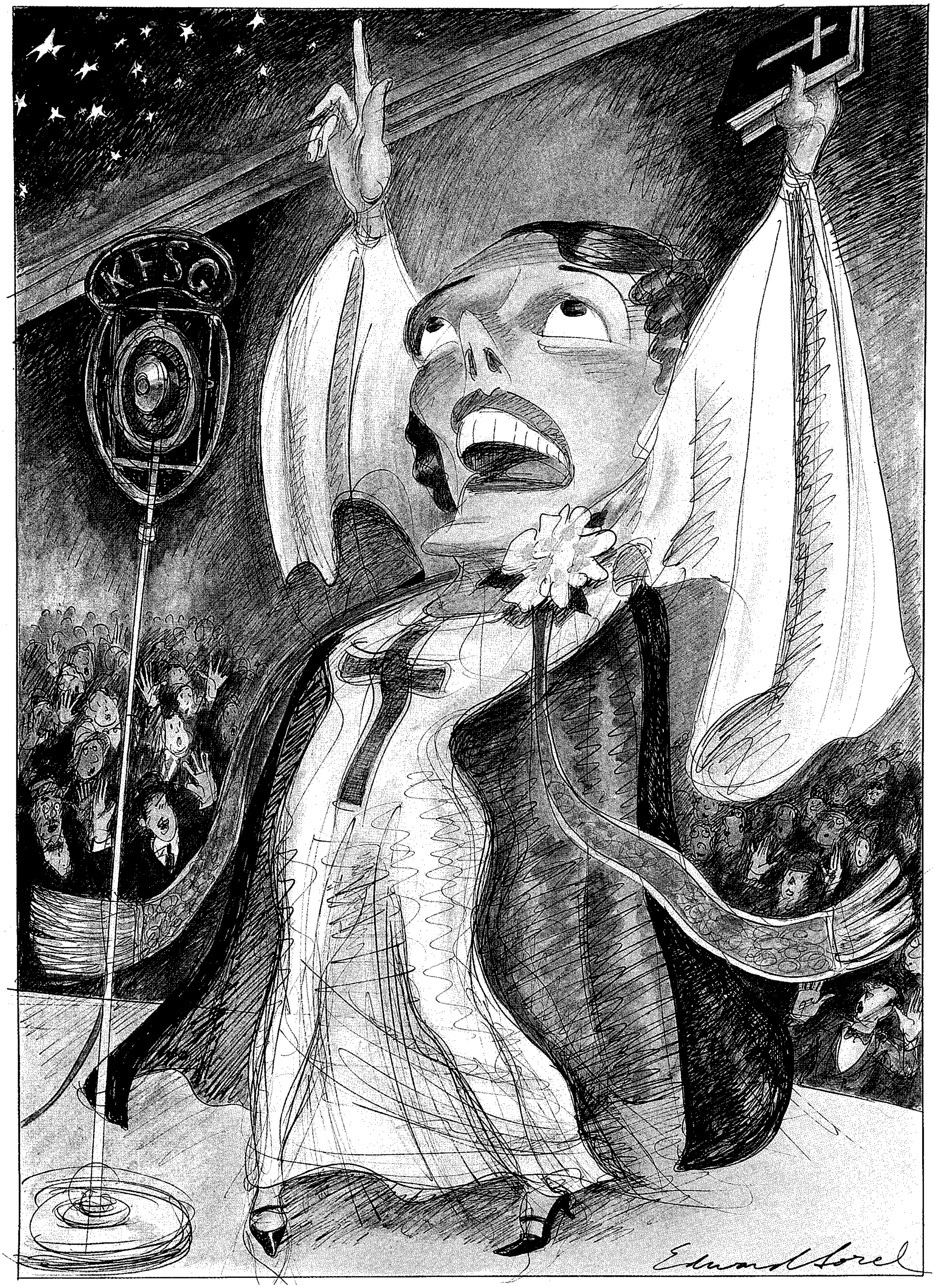
> I suddenly felt as if a shock of electricity had struck my foot. It flowed through my whole body, causing me to shake and tremble under the power of God. Instantaneously my foot was perfectly healed.

Between 1916 and 1923, Sister Aimee, as she called herself, travelled the glory trail coast to coast six times and preached in more than a hundred cities. She and her mother arrived in Los Angeles in 1918, and within a few years she decided to build an inexpensive wooden tabernacle there, for local meetings; on New Year's Day of 1923, she dedicated the Angelus Temple, near Echo Park, at the corner of Sunset and Glendale Boulevards. It seated more than five thousand, was topped by a rotating lighted cross visible from fifty miles away, and became, thanks to McPherson's eloquence, fervor, and theatrical flair, a leading Los Angeles institution and tourist attraction. She extended her ministry with an evangelical newspaper, *The Bridal Call*, and, beginning in 1924, with foresighted employment of a novel medium, radio, broadcasting sermons and services over her own station, KFSG (Kall Four Square Gospel).

National celebrity followed upon a series of newsworthy personal scandals, of which the most headlined, in 1926, involved her disappearance from Venice Beach and her reappearance, five weeks later, in a Mexican border town. She claimed to have been kidnapped by a trio of malefactors named Steve, Jake, and Mexicali Rose; she escaped, she said, from an isolated shack by sawing through her bonds with the jagged edge of a syrup can and walking for seventeen hours across the desert. For all its suspect details (she emerged from her desert ordeal neither sunburned nor dehydrated, wearing unscuffed shoes and a watch that she had not taken with her to the beach), she stuck to her story through a number of hearings and trials. An alternative story, which the newspapers were quick to air, held that she had spent the missing five weeks trysting in Carmel or elsewhere with Kenneth Gladstone Ormiston, the handsome, dapper, and married radio engineer who had been in charge of KFSG's operations. He and Aimee had daily technical exchanges, which some eavesdroppers considered suspiciously friendly, if not raucous, in tone. The Los Angeles district attorney investigated the alleged abduction and then had her arrested, along with her mother and Ormiston, on charges of "corruption of public morals, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy to manufacture evidence." The public and the press couldn't get enough of the trial—grandstands were erected in municipal court—though in the end all the charges were dismissed. McPherson's Foursquare Gospel continued to be rousingly proclaimed at the Angelus Temple, and her thousands of devotees remained loyal during the furor, but her reputation had taken on a taint, a fascinating hint of sexual errancy, that lasted until her death. She was only fifty-three when she died, of a probably accidental overdose of barbiturates, in 1944.

Her fame and her aura transcended those of a religious figure; she consorted with Hollywood stars as an equal and charmed even H. L. Mencken, no booster of evangels. (He felt, with reason, that she was persecuted by the Babbitts and official bullies of Los Angeles.) The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, spawned by the Angelus Temple, which at her death included four hundred and ten churches, two hundred mission stations, and about twenty-nine thousand members, has come to involve, under the leadership of her son, Rolf, and his successors, more than twenty-five thousand churches, a membership approaching two million, and a third of a billion dollars in funds. The story of her life, which she dramatized in a number of high-flown and breathlessly candid memoirs and sermons, was retold by two biographers in the early nineties, Edith Blumhofer and Daniel Mark Epstein, and is now told again, with a determined sociological thrust, by Matthew Avery Sutton, in "Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America" (Harvard; $26.95).

Sutton, in three copious pages of acknowledgments, records that his uncle is a "longtime Foursquare minister" and that his grandmother's life was "a testament to the power of the Foursquare gospel." Though he maintains in his prose the dispassionate scholarly demeanor befitting a publication of the Harvard University Press, his conclusion amounts, sixty years after her death, to a reselling of Sister Aimee: "From her location in Hollywood, Aimee Semple McPherson reshaped and redefined the old-time religion in the United States, in effect resurrecting Christian America." Sutton's reaching for such a high esti-


KFSG
Edward Sorel

McPherson was a full-time revival preacher, broadcasting sermons and services over her Kall Four Square Gospel radio station.

mate of his subject's historical importance slights the aspects of her personal story that would feed and deepen a psychological portrait. He mentions Blumhofer's emphasis on "the evangelist's Canadian roots and the religious context in which she matured," as if to admit that his own emphasis is elsewhere.

Sutton begins by describing a 1934 pageant that finds her magic in full flower, and then flashes back to the opening of her spectacular megachurch. Her formative years, up to her marriage to Robert Semple and his death, in Hong Kong, from dysentery and malaria contracted on the Chinese mainland, are covered in three brisk pages, whereas Epstein's biography, "Sister Aimee," takes nearly seventy pages to reach the same point. We learn that she was a headstrong, clever, religiously troubled, and not always manageable girl, the only child of an orphan mother greatly attached to the brassy, egalitarian, and unconventional Salvation Army. Minnie Kennedy, married at fifteen to a man of fifty, had prayed for a daughter, and Aimee was raised with the maternal indulgence and high hopes more usually bestowed on a son. Mother and daughter were alike ambitious, and when Aimee found her religious vocation Minnie went with her and managed everything, including the finances. Neither was cut out for marital subservience; Aimee was to write that her mother was early "compelled to acknowledge that she was caught in the devil's net," though James Kennedy—a devout Methodist, a choir director—was, by all outward signs, a kind and steady husband.

To the heady blend of her parents' different versions of Christian devotion was added Aimee's exposure to Darwinism and her exploration of such worldly delights and theatrics as rural Ontario provided. She was rescued from worldliness by love at first sight with a tall Irish immigrant evangelist, Robert Semple, who introduced her to a radical new religious movement, Pentecostalism. Its hallmarks were faith healing, the millennial belief that the Second Coming was imminent, and glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. After days of self-torment, sleeping and eating little but praying almost continuously, Aimee managed this last sign of inner baptism. She described the experience in her writings as a battering "through a thick stone wall that was growing as thin as tissue paper," and then as a "floating upon the billowing clouds of glory." Paraphrasing the Biblical account of Pentecost, in Acts 2:4, she declared, "Then suddenly, out of my innermost being flowed rivers of praise in other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance." Of her romance with Semple, Epstein says, "At last she had broken through to him." They married six months later and went as missionaries to China. Her husband, on their ill-fated mission, witnessed what she herself calls hysterics. Horrified by an odorous Hindu cremation occurring on the street below their windows, she began screaming. When Semple tried to comfort her, she relates:

> His sympathetic caress touched the match to the pent-up powder keg of my emotions, and immediately I was in the grasp of violent hysterics. It seemed as I listened to the high-pitched wails and wild laughter that came from my heart that the screams came from another person entirely.

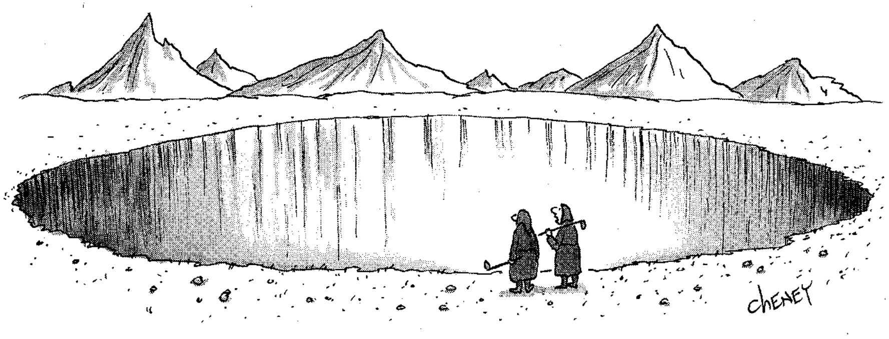
She was no stranger to out-of-body sensations. Earlier that year, en route to China, she had been unexpectedly called upon to preach in Royal Albert Hall, and, as she described it, her hour of impressive oratory came entirely from her subconscious, like speaking in tongues, only the tongue this time was English. Throughout the pressure-laden decades of her success, she suffered lapses of discipline and nervous breakdowns that led to extended periods of seclusion. She was a woman on the edge, and fascinating as such.

While her recoil from Darwinism into Pentecostal doctrine, as presented by a love object, and "good old-fashioned fundamentalism" could be said to be regressive, Sutton's biography finds much that was progressive and liberal in her social programs at the Angelus Temple. In 1927, she established a temple commissary that, as the Depression settled in, emerged as "one of the region's most effective and inclusive welfare institutions." According to Epstein:

> When the schools stopped feeding children free lunches, Aimee took over the program. When city welfare agencies staggered under the load of beggars, the women of Angelus Temple sewed quilts and baked loaves of bread by the thousands. When bread lines stretched for city blocks . . . Angelus Temple was the only place *anyone* could get a meal, clothing, and blankets, no questions asked.

She brushed aside the distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor, and that between legal and illegal residents. One Mexican, the actor Anthony Quinn, who as a teenager acted as a translator for her, told an interviewer, "During the Depression . . . the one human being that never asked you what your nationality was, what you believed in and so forth, was Aimee Semple McPherson. All you had to do was pick up the phone and say, 'I'm hungry,' and within an hour there'd be a food basket there for you. . . . She literally kept most of that Mexican community . . . alive." In an era when anti-black racism was freely expressed, not least loudly by fundamentalist white Protestants, she persistently tried to make "interracial revival a reality at Angelus Temple," bringing a series of black leaders to its pulpit and welcoming into the congregation poor Southern blacks who had recently immigrated to a Los Angeles of increasing racial tensions. The same week of the Detroit race riots, in June of 1943, McPherson publicly converted the notorious black former heavyweight champion Jack Johnson on the Temple stage, and embraced him "as he raised his hand in worship."

Nor, herself a feminist symbol, though not a member of any feminist organization, did she neglect the cause of gender equality. She graduated female preachers from her LIFE Bible College, ordaining many in Foursquare churches.



"Maybe it would be more fun with a smaller hole."

Confronted with St. Paul's admonition "Let your women keep silence in the churches," she offered the exegesis that he was referring not to preaching or prophesying but to "chatter," as the segregated women in the ancient church tended their babies. The Pauline text she preferred to cite was Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer male nor female, bond nor free, Jew nor Gentile, for we are all equal in Jesus Christ." On a supernatural plane she envisioned Pentecost as a great melting: "Saints who were once smelted together in the fires of Pentecost are being re-united, rewelded, and rejuvenated." Closer to earth and the contemporary financial crisis, her commissary gave young mothers complete layettes and provided a day nursery for the children of working mothers, amid complaints that working women threatened "family values."

The Ontario farm girl, without disavowing fundamentalism's conservative, nativist strain, had a number of surprises in her, including a bold curiosity. Challenged by some college students in 1934 with the assertions that "the teachings of the Nazarene have outlived their usefulness" and that "cold reasoning is the new savior of the world," she embarked on a world tour that took her not only into the presence of leaders like Mussolini and Gandhi but, to quote Epstein, to "the floating brothels on the Cantonese River, the infamous Flower Boats to which impoverished fathers sold their blind daughters for food. She also visited a harem and a leper colony. Her book contains many images of women enslaved or victimized." Sister Aimee's own image—flamboyant, brave, brassy, neurotically fragile—defied contemporary attempts to pin it down. After her sudden death, her most vehement critic among the Los Angeles clergy, Robert Shuler, wrote admiringly in *The Methodist Challenge* of her appeal to "the people—the hungry-hearted people" and, while he admitted that he could "never understand why God used Aimee," also admitted that the army of preachers and workers she left behind was "nearer akin to the army with which Wesley started than we Methodists would rejoice to concede." From a standpoint outside Christianity, the distinction between mainstream Protestantism and marginal movements like Pentecostalism and the Salvation Army appears less significant than it does from within; all shades of the Christian religion derive from the same sketchy Gospel accounts of a charismatic miracle worker and a cosmic narrative wildly different from what science shows. Pentecostalism is unusual primarily in its expectation of present-day miracles—faith healing, talking in tongues—like those reported in Acts. But any version of Christianity must resort, in the end, to an assertion of faith, to fundamentalism of a sort, be it as simple as shouts of assent at a revival meeting or as pondered and impressively phrased as Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy.

Sutton's attempt to carve out a pivotal role for McPherson in the amorphous seethe of twentieth-century Christianity in America itself seems mostly a matter of assertion, rather than a demonstrable thesis. She was, we do not doubt, "a superstar who, though dogged by scandal, was adored by her followers, large segments of the press, and the increasingly secular American public." But "increasingly secular" may be the most telling phrase. There was a tide of irreligion that she could not stem. Her scandals, her mercenary bent and vanity, and her eventually rampant worldliness hurt her cause. In 1927, she rattled teacups by bobbing her trademark long auburn hair; she slimmed down her stocky figure, shopped for clothes in Paris, and was caught trying to smuggle some past U.S. customs. Sutton owns up to "her predominantly negative image in American popular culture." Can it be true, even taking into account the growth of the Foursquare denomination, that "religion in the United States reaped the benefit of her popularity"? It might as well be said that the film industry reaped a benefit from Marilyn Monroe's popularity; she, too, captivated the "hungry-hearted," and vanished in a haze of self-medication and aborted relationships.

McPherson's hope that, as she wrote, "romance and Religion can walk hand in hand, and love and faith can find room in the heart of a woman" produced, after her divorce from the lingeringly loyal McPherson, another terminated marriage, this time to the three-hundred-pound David Hutton, whom she had hired to sing the part of the Pharaoh in her sacred opera "The Iron Furnace." The marriage gave her a few happy months, but foundered when Hutton was sued by a massage nurse for breach of promise. McPherson and her strong-willed mother had already become permanently estranged, and before her death Aimee suffered a heavily publicized, litigious break with her daughter, Roberta. Like many another enchantress of the public, she attained few and fleeting private satisfactions. Her personal story is so arresting, poignant, and fantastic that the reader resents Sutton's muffling it in portentous generalizations:

> Whether she intended to or not, McPherson embodied the changing norms regarding women's sexuality, fashions, and bodies in that era.

> In effect, McPherson was redefining the relationship between conservative Protestantism and American culture by working to harness the religious potential of the new mass media.

The reality of her, gone from the scene for most of a century, emerges affectingly not in sociological boasts but in anecdotes that take her as she came. In 1927, a month after the charges against her were dismissed in Los Angeles, she arrived in New York in furs and a yellow suit, and was taken to a prime watering spot of the Roaring Twenties, Texas Guinan's speakeasy, on Fifty-fourth Street. A reporter called out, with whatever sardonic intent, that she should be invited to speak. Guinan agreed, and, as Epstein tells it, "Aimee, demure, dignified, stone sober . . . left her table and stood in the center of the dance floor, smiling until everyone was quiet." Then she said:

> Behind all these beautiful clothes, behind these good times, in the midst of your lovely buildings and shops and pleasures, there is another life. There is something on the other side. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" With all your getting and playing and good times, do not forget you have a Lord. Take Him into your hearts.

And that was all—a miniature masterpiece of the evangelist's art, silencing a boozy crowd in no mood to hear it. Epstein writes, "All at once they applauded, and Tex put her arm around Aimee. The clapping went on for much longer than her speech had taken." ♦

BOOKS

TUNE IN YESTERDAY

The making of broadcast television.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

Television swept across American society as rapidly as the Internet is sweeping across it now—and with even greater immediate effects. At the midpoint of the twentieth century, radio was the dominant broadcast medium, newspapers were the dominant news medium, and movies were the most popular form of visual entertainment. Within ten years, television had taken over. Vast wasteland though it may have been (Newton Minow, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, called it that in 1961), television had become the basic forum of American culture.

So it's easy to forget that everything about it was once up for grabs. There was a lot of earnest debate about what form it ought to take, and people in the business stumbled around trying to figure out how to make money at it. In "Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television, 1948-1961" (Johns Hopkins; $35), James L. Baughman performs the basic historian's function of taking a story whose conclusion we all know and showing that it didn't necessarily have to turn out that way. By the end of the period he covers, there were three national broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—with the same basic regimen: news in the early morning and early evening, soap operas in the afternoon, situation comedies and dramas during prime time, and talk late at night. It was the known world. In the beginning, though, things were unrecognizably different.

In the early fifties, very few people had sets, most of those who did lived in big cities on the coasts, and most programming was live. There was hardly any news; the appeal of sports broadcasts was not fully apparent, so Sunday afternoons were a dead zone filled with public-service programming. Shows were usually sponsored by a single advertiser, who exercised a high degree of control over the content. Programming was a seller's market: nobody who was anybody wanted to be a television star. (That was why television's earliest star was the washed-up Milton Berle, and why several of his immediate successors—Lucille Ball, Ed Sullivan, Jackie Gleason, Arthur Godfrey—couldn't get arrested in Hollywood, either.) The most powerful person in the business, David Sarnoff, of NBC, thought of himself as an engineering whiz and electronics tycoon, and believed that the main economic purpose of his network was to generate demand for the television sets he manufactured.

The period that Baughman covers is the "golden age of television"—the much mourned era of dramas by Paddy Chayefsky and documentaries by Edward R. Murrow. Baughman, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, means to demythologize it. Television is the way it is, he seems to be saying, not because vulgar or greedy people got their hands on it but because of the tastes of a mass audience.

At the center of Baughman's account is Sylvester (Pat) Weaver, who was the president of NBC in the mid-nineteen-fifties. "Weaver is the historian's tempter," Baughman writes, meaning that Weaver, a wellborn former advertising executive, set himself up as the good guy in the battles over the new medium. He wrote wonderful memos, as well as an autobiography that he published in old age. It isn't just his prose that is seductive; it's the side he took. Weaver said he wanted television to "make us all into intellectuals," and had nothing but scorn for programming about what he called "Life in America in Its Comedy Aspects." Instead, he went for lengthy live variety shows that he called "spectaculars," with respectable stars and interludes of middlebrow drama, orchestral performances, opera, Shakespeare. (Weaver also created "Today," which, after "Meet the Press," is the longest-running show on television.) He wanted television to be more like theatre than radio or the movies. It would emanate from New York, its bond with viewers would come from special events rather than from continuity and familiarity, and its audience would have the thrill of knowing that what it was watching was taking place on a set at that exact moment.

One important aspect of Weaver's vision prevailed: as a forum for advertising, television adopted what he called the "magazine concept," meaning that it sold slots of time rather than sponsorships of entire shows. As the magazine concept spread, it greatly reduced the creative latitude of advertisers, who in the early days not only could kill a program but could censor its content line by line. De Soto's ad agency, Groucho Marx recalled, forced a contestant on his quiz show to give himself an invented name, because his real name was Ford. Kodak made Ozzie and Harriet Nelson go on more family vacations, so that they could be shown taking photographs. Pressure from U.S. Steel made Rod Serling recast the murder of Emmett Till as a tragedy befalling a Jewish pawnbroker in New England. The magazine concept appealed to Weaver because it gave television programmers more control over content, but what the networks wound up doing with their editorial freedom, mainly, was creating unchallenging but lovable series filmed in Los Angeles. Weaver was deposed at NBC in 1956, and his logistically difficult spectaculars faded away. The dominant figure in television was now William S. Paley, of CBS, who (unlike Sarnoff) saw himself primarily as a programmer, and who (unlike Weaver) had no illusion that shows he personally admired would attract the largest audiences.

Although Baughman is scrupulously respectful of the achievements of Weaver, Murrow, and other heroes of fifties television, he never misses a chance to offer up contrarian material. We learn, for example, that CBS as well as NBC programmed high-mindedly for a while. (Robert McNamara, as the boy-wonder president of Ford, ended his company's sponsorship of a CBS show called "Ford Star Jubilee" after it devoted a great deal of airtime to low-rated segments featuring Noël Coward.) NBC as well as CBS broadcast lowbrow material for the masses; "The Howdy Doody Show" was one of the hit shows of television's infancy. Very few Americans watched the programs we think riveted the nation; the Army-McCarthy hearings drew a mere ten-per-cent audience share. Of all the famous public-affairs broadcasts of the fifties, only the Kefauver hearings were truly popular—they got a thirty-two-per-cent share—and that was because they were about organized crime. As the television audience grew larger and took in people from small towns and the middle of the country, it became obvious that Americans wanted predictable, familiar entertainment, featuring, as Baughman astutely observes, stock situations and stars who had unusually expressive faces that lent themselves to cartoonish mugging shown in closeup. The results were often terrific, but never uplifting.

Forces on the supply side of programming were in accord with forces on the demand side. Live television, which required performers to memorize an hour's worth of lines at a time and risk being photographed unflatteringly, was popular with practically nobody but Pat Weaver, and Los Angeles—rich in soundstages and talent—rather than New York was the natural home for television production. In "NBC: America's Network" (California; $60), a collection of scholarly articles, Douglas Gomery, of the University of Maryland's Library of American Broadcasting, argues that the real architect of television production was neither Weaver nor Paley but the powerful agent-producer Lew Wasserman, of M.C.A., who figured out how to put together filmed series in a way that would be financially advantageous to the stars, the networks, and, of course, himself, and then went over Weaver's head and dealt with David Sarnoff. It quickly became clear that successful series were the economic engine of network television.

On no subject is Baughman more slyly iconoclastic than television news. The main reason it came into existence, he suggests, is that network executives, acutely aware that the United States was the only Western nation to have a predominantly private and commercial system of television, wanted to protect their berth. Broadcasters were legally required to operate in the "public interest," and they took the requirement seriously, albeit more as a meaningful threat than as a sacred duty. That's where news came in. In effect, it was a means to the end of being permitted to prosper in the entertainment business. In this respect, Pat Weaver's eclipse may actually have been good for news. Weaver, according to Baughman, had little interest in journalism; "quality," for him, meant culture. After Weaver left network television, orchestra concerts lost their champion, and news had an exclusive claim to demonstrating the networks' devotion to the public interest. Of course, some broadcasters were genuinely interested in journalism. But nobody should imagine that broadcasters courageously launched aggressive news divisions in the face of government hostility; if Baughman has it right, broadcasters became journalistic because the government forced them to.

News, like "culture," was a way for networks to show regard for the public interest.

LAURIE ROSENWALD

ABC came into being because the F.C.C., back in 1941, ordered NBC to divest itself of one of the two national radio networks that it owned, the Red and the Blue. The Red was the more valuable of the two, because it carried less news and other public-affairs programming, and so had a bigger audience and more advertising revenue. NBC got rid of the Blue network, which its new owners renamed ABC. Rather than build on the network's strength in news, executives quickly cut back ABC's journalistic commitment in order to make it more profitable. In the fifties, when ABC was trying to build itself up into a real competitor to NBC and CBS as a television network, it barely had a news division. The networks' decision to cover the quadrennial national political-party conventions, beginning in 1948, was, Baughman implies, motivated mainly by the thought that a heavily regulated industry would do well to make itself a big presence at a gathering of federal officials. The networks' commitment to documentary units, beginning in the late fifties, coincided with the aftermath of the quiz-show scandals, when it was necessary, once again, to convince public officials that there was no need to tinker with the American model of broadcasting. Even the advent of televised debates between Presidential candidates, in 1960, was, to Baughman, just "one more bone tossed to the chattering classes" by the networks' ever-fearful internal-reputation police. One can only hope that Baughman does not choose to make his next book a history of Santa Claus.

As time went on, broadcasters learned how to adapt journalism to the presentational imperatives of the medium: continuity, familiarity, personification, drama. Baughman demonstrates that the rise of the star anchor—his nominee for the pioneer figure is NBC's David Brinkley—was a precondition of television journalism's coming-of-age. A little after the period Baughman covers, the television-news genius Don Hewitt, of CBS, figured out how to use familiar stars and perfectly turned small dramas to create television news's longest-running prime-time hit, "60 Minutes." A new book, "Harry Reasoner: A Life in the News" (Texas; $29.95), by an Associated Press writer named Douglass K. Daniel, brings to its subject, an anchor and a "60 Minutes" correspondent, greater thoroughness than he probably deserves. But Daniel helpfully establishes how much more important Reasoner's amiably authoritative manner and his verbal fluidity were to his success than the traditional journalistic virtues.

Reasoner was a member of the early generation of television newsmen who prided themselves on their roots in print journalism, but for him these roots were pretty shallow. By the time he was hired by CBS News, Reasoner had been a P.R. man at Northwest Airlines and a government press officer. During most of his flourishing career, Reasoner had a reputation among his colleagues for laziness and hard drinking. Still, he was a real fixture, who through most of the sixties was considered the leading candidate to succeed Walter Cronkite as the "CBS Evening News" anchor. Reasoner had qualities that were associated with building audiences for news: he was a star but in an unglamorous way, and, respectful toward authority without being deferential, he struck just the right balance between gravity and irreverence, Midwesternness and sophistication. Today, a quarter century into the era of television deregulation, the networks and the local stations no longer cleave to the news to protect their licenses, but they have worked out how to make money on certain kinds of news broadcasting. The other kinds they tend to avoid.

These recent books, Baughman's especially, provide a useful backdrop to the sociologist Eric Klinenberg's "Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media" (Metropolitan; $26). Klinenberg writes as someone entirely in sympathy with the media-reform movement, which sees the big media companies as a malign force in American life. Although the movement is, to some extent, politically ambidextrous—Senator Trent Lott sometimes sides with it, for example—its members are mainly on the left, and they treat the media as at best compliant with, and at worst complicit in, the misadventures of the Bush Administration. At the movement's most recent major convention, in Memphis this past January, Bill Moyers gave a keynote speech in which he decried the "plantation mentality" of media owners. "What does today's media system mean for the notion of an informed public cherished by democratic theory?" Moyers asked. "Quite literally, it means that virtually everything the average person sees or hears, outside of her own personal communications, is determined by the interests of private, unaccountable executives and investors whose primary goal is increasing profits and raising the share prices. More insidiously, this small group of élites determines what ordinary people do not see or hear."

Klinenberg plainly means for "Fighting for Air" to serve as a "Fast Food Nation" for media reformers, who are now hoping to persuade the F.C.C. to establish tighter limits on how many broadcast properties a single company can own. Because the media-reform movement has been up and running for years—two of the five F.C.C. commissioners are members in good standing—"Fighting for Air" feels more like an adroit and impassioned summary of a body of thought than a work that lays out an argument for the first time.

A concern about the dangers of concentration of ownership runs through most of the history of American broadcast regulation—it's why the F.C.C. called for the breakup of NBC, back in 1941—and the main danger people have worried about is that it puts too much power in too few hands, given the disproportionate influence of the media. (Media ownership is nowhere near as concentrated as ownership has been in any of the industries, from oil to personal-computer operating systems, that have run afoul of federal antitrust regulations.) But Klinenberg's argument is more particular: that ownership affects day-to-day content. He sees local content as the supreme good, and holds that local ownership produces more local content. "What has happened to our nation's rich and diverse supply of local media outlets?" he asks in the opening pages of "Fighting for Air." A little later, he complains that "media conglomerates have devastated locally produced newspapers, television stations, and radio programs throughout the country." "Concerned citizens," Klinenberg says, "share one widespread conviction: that the distinctively local voices, personalities, and sources of news and entertainment that used to animate radio, television, newspaper, and alternative weeklies have been crushed by an onslaught of cookie-cutter content."

Unfortunately, Klinenberg never establishes a baseline period in which both media ownership and content were more diverse, which means that he never shows exactly when and to what extent they became less diverse. Certainly, nowhere in Baughman's exhaustively researched book do we encounter an example of a local television station with a deep commitment to independent news reporting. In the fifties, Baughman tells us, when a large fire broke out near a Schenectady television station, its news manager told his reporters to call the Associated Press. Baughman's subject is television in its early days; perhaps aggressive and independently owned local stations emerged after that. But then Klinenberg should have laid that story out. Nor do we get real evidence that local content correlates with local ownership. Some local owners save money by running a lot of national and international wire-service and syndicated material; some chain owners insist on strict localism because they think national news is box-office poison. (At one point, Klinenberg mentions that television stations, as they are being bought up by chains, are actually increasing the time they devote to local news coverage, though he argues that they are adding local airtime without adding local reporters.)

It is indisputable that the F.C.C. has loosened its ownership limits, and that big media companies have increased their broadcast holdings accordingly. It was the Clinton Administration's Telecommunications Act of 1996, dramatically raising the number of radio stations one company could own, that enabled Clear Channel Communications, Klinenberg's No. 1 villain, to become the dominant station owner. Still, Klinenberg doesn't tell us how many of the stations that Clear Channel bought had been locally owned, with robust newsroom budgets and distinctive programming that the new owners eliminated. (Last fall, Clear Channel announced plans to sell nearly half its radio stations; it also announced plans to sell itself to a group of private-equity investors.)

Baughman's history of early television seems to carry two lessons for people with improving impulses toward the media. First, at least in the realm of broadcasting, compulsion works. One way to get radio and television stations to do more local coverage is simply to order them to do so. That may sound like a shocking intrusion on freedom of the press, but it is in no way inconsistent with the history of American broadcasting. Conversely, there's no reason to assume that changes in ownership will dovetail with changes in content. If our goal is to improve content, why not regulate content directly, as the F.C.C. used to do, rather than obliquely via ownership regulations?

Second, every medium has distinctive qualities that, through trial and error, its owners must come to understand before they can create a lasting bond with an audience. Television, in news no less than in entertainment, has to come to us in a regular, dependable form, with captivating story lines and heroes and heroines we're comfortable inviting into our homes as frequent guests. Radio, newspapers, magazines—each medium has distinct imperatives. It is still too early in the life of the Internet to know what its forms will wind up being. Media reformers are excited about its potential as a forum for independent voices, which would provide alternatives to the views of the big media. Since the Web has infinite capacity, and practically nonexistent barriers to entry, this potential is already in evidence. But there are people who, half a century from now, will get credit for having figured out how to use the Internet to transform American public culture, on a scale of importance comparable to television. They will be the ones with the showmanship and the instinctive feel for the medium to have created material that could appear nowhere else and that lots of people love. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Color of a Dog Running Away, *by Richard Gwyn (Doubleday; $21.95).* At thirty-three, Lucas, a Welsh-born expatriate, has drifted into a modest but pleasurable life in Barcelona: occasional translation work, long nights in neighborhood bars, strong coffee in local cafés, and comical exchanges with an Andalusian neighbor who rears rabbits on their common roof. But when Lucas falls in love with a stunning woman he encounters at the Miró Foundation his life becomes the stuff of melodrama: first, he is visited at night by the "roof people," who steal some rabbits and leave behind the mark of a yellow cross; then he is menaced by a band of modern-day Cathars who believe he may have betrayed them seven centuries earlier. At once an absurdist riddle, a romantic quest, and a love letter to our antihero's chosen home, Gwyn's witty and assured first novel is as much about the different ways you can tell a story as it is about the story itself.

Kalooki Nights, *by Howard Jacobson (Simon & Schuster; $26).* Jacobson revisits his roots in postwar Jewish Manchester through the figure of Max Glickman, a cartoonist drawn neither to the synagogue nor to kalooki, a kind of rummy that trumped religious ritual in his socialist parents' home. Nevertheless, Max can't get beyond the conundrum of Jewish difference, an obsession that gets worked on, but never quite worked through, in doomed relationships with Zoë, Alÿs, and other women (most of them Gentile, all with diacritical marks), and in his frustrated artistic career. His magnum opus, titled "Five Thousand Years of Bitterness," began as a boyhood collaboration with an Orthodox neighbor who introduced Max to evidence of Nazi atrocities and later gassed his own parents. Jacobson spins a loose yarn around Max's inquiry into his old friend's crime, leaving plenty of opportunities for caustic insights and hilarious detours, as when the teen-aged Max, on his first double date, embarrasses himself in front of Isaiah Berlin.

Poor People, *by William T. Vollmann (Ecco; $29.95).* Following Vollmann's three-thousand-page treatise on violence, this relatively slender book is framed as a collection of "snapshots" showing how "certain poor people experienced their poverty at random moments." Vollmann disavows the kind of sustained analysis attempted in "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men," which he considers a failure, "because it consists of two rich men observing the lives of the poor." But, as Vollmann acknowledges, he, too, is rich, compared to those he encounters, and a sense of guilt pervades these pages. His unsentimental portraits—of Russian beggars, indentured Chinese prostitutes, Kazakh schoolteachers reduced to shovelling snow—are revelatory. When he asks people why they are destitute, almost none lay blame on others or express animosity toward the rich. One says, "We just had poor luck adjusting."

The Italian Letter, *by Peter Eisner and Knut Royce (Rodale; $24.95).* In October, 2002, in a basement bistro in Rome, an intelligence peddler named Rocco Martino handed a reporter a folder of documents. One of them, a letter describing the sale by Niger of five hundred tons of uranium to Iraq, made its way into President Bush's 2003 State of the Union speech before being exposed, by weapons inspectors, in a quick Internet search, as a fraud. Eisner and Royce get past the morass of speculation surrounding the documents to provide an important look at the shabby materials from which the Administration built its case for war. The ineptitude of the forgeries, which were dismissed by experts at every stage, never loses the capacity to astound. The retrieval of these documents "from the intelligence garbage heap," the authors make clear, could have happened only in a White House in which intelligence had been deliberately politicized.

BOOKS

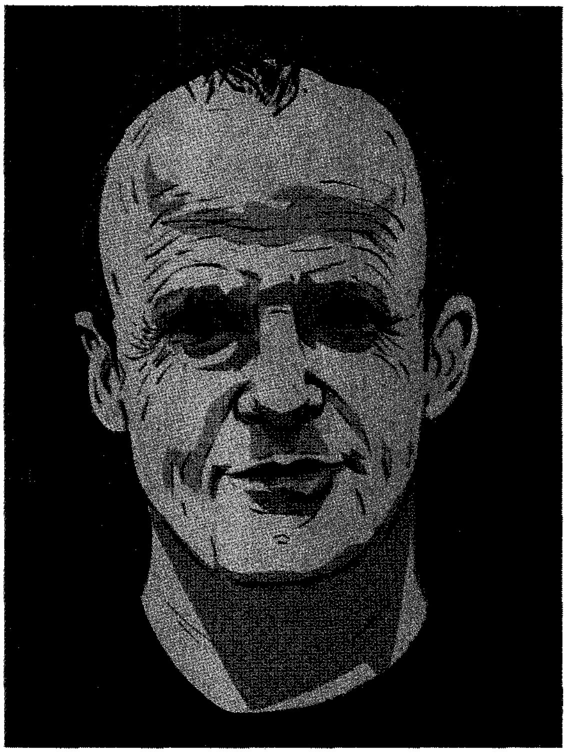
RACK AND RUIN

Jim Crace conjures a post-apocalyptic America.

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

Long the province of genre entertainments—science fiction, dystopian fantasy, post-apocalyptic movies—the future has been boldly explored in recent years by such writers as P. D. James ("The Children of Men"), John Updike ("Toward the End of Time"), Margaret Atwood ("The Handmaid's Tale," "Oryx and Crake"), Doris Lessing ("Mara and Dann"), and Cormac McCarthy ("The Road"). Now comes a grim prophetic fable by the much admired British writer Jim Crace, who in previous novels—"The Gift of Stones," set at the dawn of the Bronze Age; "Quarantine," in the time of Christ—has shown a flair for imaginatively evoking the past. Kingsley Amis once remarked that there isn't much point to writing if you can't annoy someone; it might be said that there isn't much point to writing about the future unless you can frighten someone. Certainly, most fiction about the future—not least the famous dystopian works by Wells, Huxley, and Orwell—is designed to unsettle and provoke. These novels are fundamentally didactic; their authors have crucial lessons to impart. Contemporary "speculative fiction" shares that aim; it extrapolates from current conditions and urges us to confront the consequences.

Crace's effort, aptly titled "The Pesthouse" (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $24.95), is set in an indeterminate American future, scarcely distinguishable from a frontier past. The country has largely reverted to wilderness, much of its soil contaminated by toxins, in the wake of a series of catastrophes that people recall only vaguely: the "Grand Contagion"; "mocking" storms, floods, mud slides, droughts, famines; "anarchy and spite." The surviving inhabitants are illiterate, childlike, and credulous, lacking not only a history of their own predicament but also any real sense of the loss. What persist are ill-understood but unquestioned folk sayings. ("Metal has brought death into the world. Rust and fire are God's reply.") In mounds of debris, searchers find what they call "wordings": "a looping example of the forgotten text that had survived on so many relics of the old country and that for some reason always begged to be touched." Franklin Lopez, the strapping young man whose episodic adventures "The Pesthouse" tracks, marvels at an old pair of binoculars, made of "some material too unnatural and perfect for anybody to make or find anymore." Pre-catastrophe America is only a mythic, not a historic, past: it was rumored to have been "a land of profusion, safe from human predators, snake-free, and welcoming beyond the hog and hominy of this raw place . . . a good climate, fertile soil, wholesome air and water."



Jim Crace's ninth novel is essentially idea-driven.

RACHEL DOMM

But when Franklin and his older companion, Margaret, embark upon a pilgrimage of sorts, they are continually confronted by ruins:

> A debris field of tumbled stone and rock, stained with rust and ancient metal melt. Colossal devastated wheels and iron machines, too large for human hands, stood at the perimeter of the semicircle, as if they had been dumped by long-retreated glaciers and had no purpose now other than to age. Hardly anything grew amid the waste. The earth was poisoned, probably.

In "The Pesthouse," the United States of America has somehow vanished: not even a memory of government remains. Not a trace of law, the military, science, education, advanced technology. Even Christianity seems to have disappeared. The novelty of Crace's undone America is that the population is moving eastward, reversing the westward migrations of earlier centuries, in a desperate attempt to "emigrate" to Europe, though no one seems to know anything about this promised land. Crace's irony is indistinguishable from mockery:

> Here was where disease was in command. But there'd be no fever where they were going, would there? They wanted to believe it. There'd be no ague or calenture, no tick disease or cholera, no canker or malaria. Why, they had persuaded themselves, illness would be so rare on that side of the ocean that people would travel for a day just to watch a man sniff.

Gigantic sailships have materialized at the water's edge to carry them there, and, in the novel's most chilling scene, mobs of would-be emigrants are examined by men in black uniforms who mark their forearms with blue dye if they approve them for passage and red dye if they reject them. Only the few wealthy families, able-bodied young men and boys, and attractive women of childbearing age are chosen. So desperate are the Americans to escape the "taints and perils" of their country that they seem to be oblivious of the risk of surrendering their freedom and signing on for a wholly unknown fate. Might the sinister great-masted vessels be slave ships? Are the "emigrants" really human cargo to be delivered to European masters? And why sailships, in what appears to be the twenty-first century? We never learn, since the principals of "The Pesthouse" decide against emigrating and instead travel westward, in an abrupt and not very convincing reversal of intention. Franklin and Margaret "knew they only had to find their strength. And then—imagine it—they could begin the journey west again. They could. They could imagine striking out to claim a piece of long-abandoned land and making home in some old place, some territory begging to be used. Going westward, they would go free."

"The Pesthouse" is Jim Crace's ninth novel, and the most self-consciously mythic. Certainly, it's a far cry from the virtuoso fusion of high-concept fabulism and psychological realism you find in "Being Dead" (1999), which takes a pitilessly minute observation, as through a microscope, of the processes of organic decay in the lifeless bodies of a middle-aged married couple, and makes something unexpectedly romantic. Nor do you find the world-conjuring gifts that are on display in Crace's "Continent," "Signals of Distress," "The Gift of Stones," and "Quarantine." The new novel is almost purely conceptual, an idea-driven work that might have been more effectively executed in graphic-novel form, or in film. The post-apocalyptic landscape, though repeatedly described, is never more than generic wilderness, like the backlot set of a low-budget movie, and never acquires regional specificity. Where Crace's first, Calvino-inspired novel, "Continent," conjured an imaginary continent through the sheer poetry of language, "The Pesthouse" is blandly and perfunctorily narrated, as if in the debased speech of Dogpatch:

> Here were men who'd come from places with flat and functional names like Half-Day Bridge, Boundary Wood, Center Island, and, yes, Ferrytown, but within a day or two they expected to travel on the Dreaming Highway, which led, so they believed, through Give-Your-Word Valley to Achievement Hill and a prospect of the Last Farewell. . . . The journey to the boats . . . would be an easy and speedy one. "A hog could roll there in a sack."

The book's droll, mock-tall-tale tone soon grates: it isn't clear whether Crace wants us to feel sympathy for his characters or laugh at them as fools who have brought their collective doom upon themselves. Here is the affable simpleton Franklin:

> He proved to be a useful beast of burden, willing and easily tamed. But making him menacing and dangerous would be beyond the ingenuity of the Devil himself. The man might be big, but he was hardly daunting. He laughed inexplicably and too loudly every once in a while. He blushed like a girl. He did what he was told too readily.

Held captive by a crew of rustlers, as in a Western, Franklin is menaced by the worst kind of villain, one who threatens in rhyme: "The man who quits is cut in bits. His toes are separated from his nose." Meanwhile, in a protracted scene of pursuit and escape, Margaret eludes would-be rapists and murderers on foot and on horseback, clutching a baby in her arms. Though Margaret is thirty-one years old and has seen numerous corpses, including one of a recent rape victim, she remains inexplicably, absurdly childlike: she still thinks that "probably her danger would prove to be brief and somewhat comical." But then, we're assured, "'Rape' and 'death' were only words to her. 'Pain' she understood a little more." How is this possible, given what Margaret has experienced? Crace seems long past caring. Like Franklin, Margaret is an utterly bogus character symbolizing Simplicity and Innocence.

Even more unconvincing is an interlude, meant to be broadly satiric, in which Margaret takes up residence in the Blessed Ark, a commune of sorts presided over by a monastic order called the Finger Baptists, centered on twenty Helpless Gentlemen whose "flaccid arms and lifeless hands" have become atrophied for want of use. The process of gaining entrance to the Blessed Ark seems to replicate the experience of airline passengers making their way through security checkpoints. "Nothing metal, nothing metal," one of the Finger Baptist devotees instructs everyone in the line. "Remove all metal from your hair—no antique combs—no knives at all, no silverware, no ear or finger rings, no pans. Metal is the Devil's work. Metal is the cause of greed and war. . . . Remove your shoes. Unlace your bags."

Inside the Ark, Margaret discovers peculiar rites of homage. Since it is believed that "hands do Devil's work," these holy men must be serviced by devotees, who find themselves, in a campy rerun of Atwood's "Handmaid's Tale," pressed into duties that include bathing the holy men, spooning food into their mouths, cleaning their teeth, dressing and undressing them, massaging and masturbating them. Margaret finds herself doing some of this work: "She found the whole procedure unpleasant and disturbing." Readers can only guess how, or why, in a hardscrabble near-anarchic post-apocalyptic world, such a movement could have arisen. Just what is Crace satirizing? (Surely not the Baptist Church. Yet why Finger *Baptists*?) His depiction of these divines calls to mind Aristotle's exasperation, in the "Poetics," with episodic plots: "Of imperfect plots and actions the episodic are the worst. By an episodic plot I mean one in which the episodes do not have to each other the relation of either probability or necessity."

The great strength of Crace's previous work—nowhere more in evidence than in "Being Dead" and in "Quarantine," which compellingly imagines the fabled forty days of Christ's fast in the desert—is its inwardness; yet "The Pesthouse" is all surface, like an antic puppet show. The conclusion of the novel reunites Margaret and Franklin, imagined as mythic Adam and Eve figures destined to resettle and repopulate America. Abruptly, the novel's tone changes, as in a parody of a sentimental romance:

> It was as if the country that had once been hostile to them was regretful for it and was now providing recompense—fewer dangers, warmer nights, softer going in a season that was opening up rather than closing down. It even decorated the way with early flowers.

No more toxic soil? No more "mocking" storms? Where have "anarchy and spite" disappeared to? Evidently, we are meant to rejoice at the prospect of a new, American Adam and Eve lighting out for the territory. If the future is anything like the past, good luck to them. ◆

HOW'S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT

From the Blue Earth (Minn.) Faribault County Register.

About 18,000 deer in the state will take part in a postcard survey asking them to report information about wild turkey sightings while hunting.

THE SKY LINE

LENSES ON THE LAWN

Steven Holl rethinks the museum-extension genre.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

No art museum in the United States has a better site than the Nelson-Atkins, in Kansas City. Its austere, columned classical building, which was finished in 1933, sits on a hill overlooking a vast lawn that slopes down in terraces and gives it the air more of a royal palace than of a civic building in the Midwest. When the museum embarked on a major expansion, in 1999, it was taken as a given that this magnificent frontage was sacrosanct. There was plenty of room to build at the back, and that is exactly what five of the six architects who competed for the commission proposed. The sixth architect was Steven Holl. Born in 1947 and active since the mid-seventies, Holl is viewed as assertive by people who are trying to be complimentary, and as a bull in a china shop by people who aren't. Not surprisingly, he had no interest in hiding his building around the back. He came up with the idea of irregularly shaped boxes of translucent glass, which he called lenses, cascading down one side of the hill and linked underground by a series of galleries. They would change the view of the old museum forever.

Holl, whose major buildings include the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, in Helsinki, and a dormitory at M.I.T., has tended to present himself as an architect driven by impulses other than an interest in solving practical problems. His writings contain many exhortations like "Only by forcefully and passionately asserting our existence can we access what Mallarmé termed the 'force of the negative.'" Holl's buildings have always been intellectually provocative, but they have not always been accommodating to the needs of clients (with whom his relationships have sometimes been stormy) or even to accepted notions of beauty. Some, such as a recent brass-sided house in upstate New York with twenty-four windows that are meant to correspond to the twenty-four chapters of Homer's Odyssey, seem fanciful conceits bearing only a dim connection to normal life. But the Nelson-Atkins board chose Holl anyway, and his design was carried out with fewer alterations than is usual for a project of this scale. "Steven was the only one who had a real idea," Marc Wilson, the director of the museum, told me recently. "We knew in an instant that this was what we wanted."

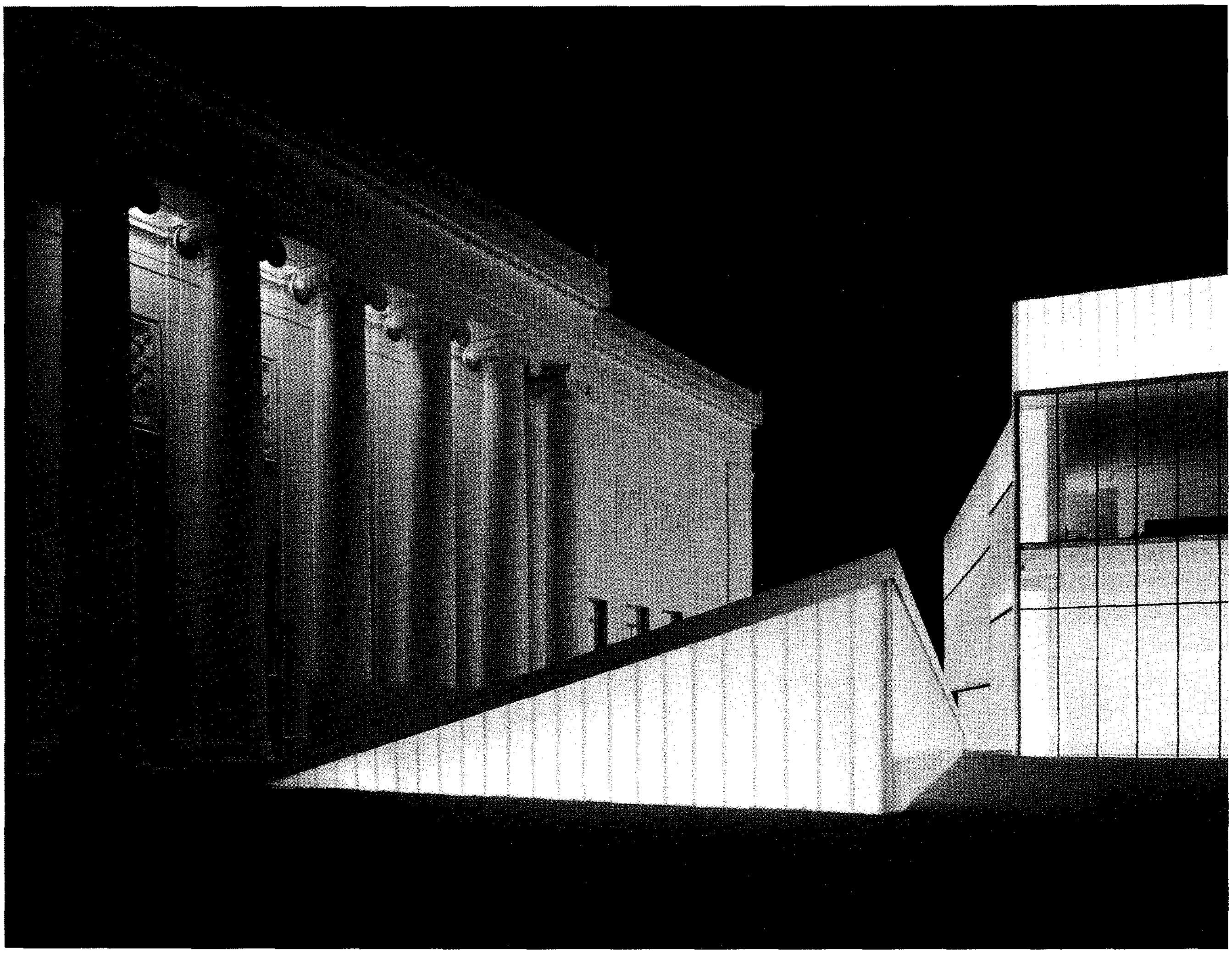
As it turns out, the building, which will open in June, is not just Holl's finest by far but also one of the best museums of the last generation. Its boldness is no surprise, but, in addition, it is laudably functional, with a clear layout, handsome and logically designed galleries, and a suffusion of natural light. Furthermore, Holl's five glass structures, punctuating the hill, don't mock the old building as you might expect; they dance before it and engage it.

The original Nelson-Atkins Museum has always seemed relentless in its symmetry, its classicism tinged with a certain nineteen-thirties squareness. Colonnades on either side brought you into an enormous, columned central hall, a ceremonial space that seemed suited more to signing treaties than to viewing art. Holl's lenses, placed to the right, disturb this symmetry and form a row roughly perpendicular to the older building and following the gradient of the hill. At the top of the hill, the first and largest of the lenses forms an L with the rear façade of the original museum, and the new and old structures form a rectangular forecourt from which either can be entered. In the middle of the forecourt is a square reflecting pool with a placid sculpture by Walter de Maria.

With multiple levels woven around a constantly changing topography, the Bloch Building, as the new structure is called, is highly complex. It never feels overwrought, however, because Holl, working with his senior partner, Chris McVoy, has constructed simple, clear paths through it. In contrast to the old building's ornate vestibule, suggestive of decorous repose, a three-story atrium in Holl's design—irregular in shape and crisscrossed by ramps and stairs and balconies—makes you want to keep moving. Long and narrow, it is finished with polished white plaster and flooded with natural light. You can enter this lobby either from street level, in which case a long ramp eases you down toward the galleries, or directly from an underground parking garage, in which case you enter at gallery level and meet the ramp coming down from above. Extending the glass-wall design of the building's exterior below ground, Holl has insured that the entrance from the garage is as appealing as the one from the street. The Bloch Building is one of the few museums anywhere designed in the recognition that, whether we like it or not, most people will arrive by car.

The atrium leads to the sequence of new galleries. You can proceed directly from one gallery to the next, walking a few steps downhill each time, or take a long, ramped promenade that passes to the side, like an indoor street. In most of the galleries, high clerestory windows allow natural light to filter through the cloudy, translucent glass and bounce down off a vaulted portion of the ceiling. Holl has written that architecture should heighten, even challenge, our sensations of light, sound, shadow, time, color, and movement, and throughout the Bloch Building he treats light as if it were a building material in itself. Illumination from the clerestory windows, as well as from sections of translucent glass wall, diffuses gently through the galleries (sometimes cunningly enhanced by artificial lighting discreetly placed in alcoves), producing an interior of cool, even light. On an early drawing for the project, Holl suggested that the lenses would be like ice.

From the outside, too, the lenses make one aware of light's inherent drama. Although they lose some of their magical quality in bright sunlight, when the translucent glass has less depth and mystery and can seem like hard plastic, their effect in the light of an overcast day is ethereal. And at night, lit from within, they are transformed into a family of weightless objects, a composition of immense light sculptures, and every surface glows with the softness of moonlight.



Holl has placed a row of translucent glass boxes down a hill to the right of the old museum. Photograph by David S. Allee.

Highly elaborate art museums by famous architects have become common in recent years, as cities strive for the so-called Bilbao effect. (Tourism to Bilbao has quintupled since Frank Gehry's Guggenheim building opened there.) Often, it has seemed as if the relationship between architecture and art were becoming a zero-sum game: the more exciting and unusual the architecture, the more it detracted from the experience of viewing pictures. Even I. M. Pei's famous 1978 East Building of the National Gallery, in Washington, D.C., arguably a forerunner of the current trend, succeeds mainly as a spectacular atrium; it does not provide convincing spaces for art, and its taut marble façade is even less relaxed than that of the sumptuous classical gallery beside it. At the Nelson-Atkins, a project in many ways comparable to the National Gallery, Holl has produced as striking and inventive a piece of architectural form as anything by Gehry, Herzog & de Meuron, or Jean Nouvel, and yet it is a serene and exhilarating place in which to view art. The building's unusual design pulls you toward it like a magnet and then recedes, in stages, once you are inside. By the time you reach the galleries, the architecture has deferred to the art.

Almost everything the Nelson-Atkins has put into the building—for example, its excellent collection of Abstract Expressionist and contemporary art—looks better than it did before. (Meanwhile, on the roof of the Bloch Building, landscaped to fuse with the rest of the lawn, the spaces between the lenses have yielded sculpture courts.) Walking around the galleries, you never feel that you are below ground, and sometimes you are not, thanks to the ingeniously uneven line of the terrain: in the small, chapel-like gallery devoted to the work of Sol LeWitt, or the expansive gallery containing the sculptures of Isamu Noguchi, you can look out across the lawn toward the old building.

Framed by such views, the grandiose temple of the Nelson-Atkins looks better than ever. Holl's design initially seems to pay scant attention to the old building, and to be the opposite of everything that the classical vocabulary represents. But Holl has avoided the trap of honoring an older structure by closely echoing its architectural cues, a choice that would surely have resulted in a mass of masonry overwhelming a beautiful setting. Instead, the lightness and softness of his buildings, and their asymmetry, bestow on the classical museum a kind of perpetual gravitas, as well as ceding it pride of place. Going his own way, Holl has produced a far finer homage to the old Nelson-Atkins than he would have if he had copied its Ionic columns. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

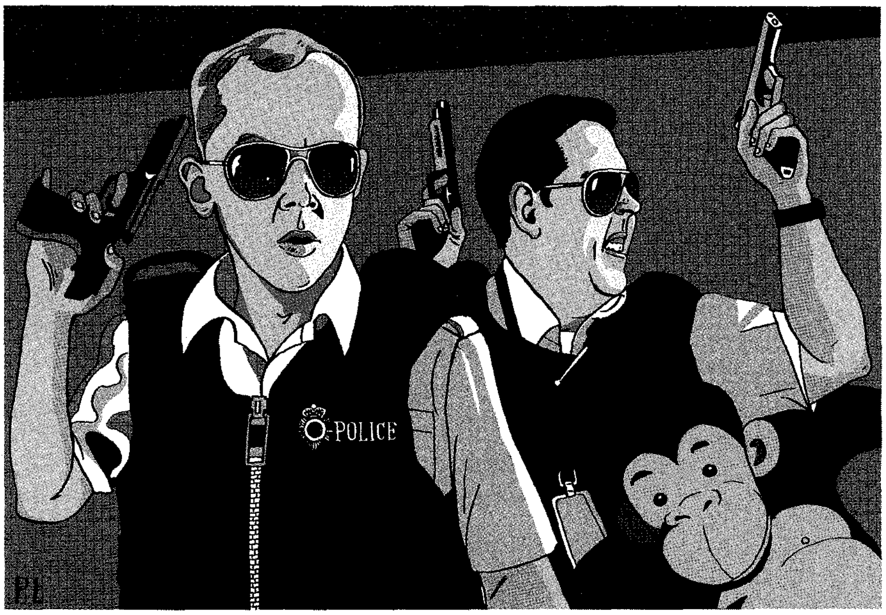
MAGNUM FARCE

"Hot Fuzz" and "The Valet."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The place of silliness in motion pictures is a matter of the utmost seriousness. If I were called upon to defend it, I would present three exhibits: "The Battleship Potemkin" (1925), directed by Sergei Eisenstein; "The Untouchables" (1987), directed by Brian De Palma; and "Naked Gun 33⅓: The Final Insult" (1994), which was hardly directed at all. What links the trio, of course, is a flight of steps. In Eisenstein's movie, the Odessa Steps form a harrowing (and bumpy) backdrop to the massacre of innocents, summarized in the descent of a baby carriage and a mother's horror. De Palma mimics this, drawing out to inordinate length what his Russian forebear spliced into jagged montage. The "Naked Gun" effort simply spoofs it, with Leslie Nielsen pausing on the steps, still firing his gun, to pick up a dropped quarter. What we honestly require here is the first and third attempts: the visual assault and brute political fervor of one, the unbridled horseplay of the other. What we can do without is the De Palma—the spectacle of a style admiring itself, unable to turn away.

I thought of Nielsen, the ringmaster of dumbness, when watching "Hot Fuzz." This movie comes from the team behind "Shaun of the Dead," and displays the same impassiveness in the face of outrageous events. As before, the star is Simon Pegg and the director is Edgar Wright; together, they co-wrote the script. Pegg plays Nicholas Angel, a British policeman who is booted out of his big-city job for solving too many crimes and thus shaming the rest of the force. Curt, fit, and unloved, he is exiled to the docile country town of Sandford, where the most notable crime is the gratuitous harm done to Shakespeare by the amateur dramatic society. The place is so pretty that it even boasts a model village on its outskirts—a second Sandford in miniature, erected for the delectation of tourists. As for Nicholas's new colleagues, they are an insult to law enforcement. His partner, Danny Butterman (Nick Frost), is pleasant enough, but you wouldn't back him in a sprint against a giant panda. Danny's father, Inspector Frank Butterman (Jim Broadbent), is rarely seen without a bowl of dessert and a spoon. What, in this well-nourished idyll, could go wrong?



Simon Pegg and Nick Frost in a new movie from the "Shaun of the Dead" team.

PATRICK LONG

Needless to say, savage murders ensue. This leaves Nicholas with a townful of suspects, headed by the manager of the supermarket, played by a mustachioed Timothy Dalton. (The moment at which Dalton grabs hold of a redheaded boy and exclaims "Stay back, or the gingernut gets it!" is to my ears the noblest line reading since the demise of Sir John Gielgud.) The presence of a former James Bond in the cast is the most blatant of the in-jokes that bestrew the film; indeed, the whole enterprise goes far beyond pastiche, wreathing its characters in a film-intoxicated world. Danny, in particular, is a devout Bruckheimerian: a follower of violent, cacophonous American cop movies, who prefers "Bad Boys II" to "Bad Boys"—a fine scholarly distinction—and really wants to know if Nicholas has ever fired two guns while throwing himself sideways through the air. Or, failing that, "Ever been in a high-speed pursuit?" The film even finds time to glance at the homoerotic bonding of the buddy picture, with a scene of the two partners—Butterman and Angel—slumped together on a couch. When Nicholas admits that he finds it hard to relax, Danny murmurs, "I can show you how," before proudly revealing his vast DVD collection.

The movie duly quickens into pursuits of every speed, and the homage to action thrillers is there in the smallest detail; the clicking of a ballpoint pen, say, is amplified to sound as menacing as the cocking of a gun. Meanwhile, behind the gags lie a number of digs at the strange dislocation of modern Britain, and anyone who still cleaves to a PBS view of the old country should be advised to seek counselling before entering the cinema. The fact is that if you wander into the village store in some blossomy Cotswold hamlet you will invariably find a wire basket full of old Chuck Norris videos or a shelf given over to the œuvre of Keanu Reeves. Pegg and Wright are, as far as I can tell, the first people to mash these unlikely components together; think of Miss Marple pulling a .44 Magnum from beneath her tweeds to waste the local curate, and you're almost there. This tweaking of a traditional image is becoming a habit: where "Shaun of the Dead" served up a London determined to maintain its scruffy, blokeish civilities even as its citizens were disembowelled by zombies, "Hot Fuzz" shows a rural community determined to maintain its patina of bliss even to the point of lunacy, and at the cost of lives—the lives of those who blight a pastoral culture that is itself in the process of dying out. What more withering portrait of a country could you find than a climactic fistfight on the teensy mean streets of a model village, with the cop impaling the villain on the steeple of a church no more than five feet high?

The films of the French director Francis Veber will never be mistaken for high art. As shown by the screenplay he wrote for "La Cage aux Folles," he prefers to make low art—thin, fast, and funny—out of Person A being mistaken for Person B, leaving the rest of the alphabet to scratch their heads. The hero of his new movie, "The Valet," is named François Pignon, but then so was the hero of other Veber films, including "The Dinner Game" (1998) and "The Closet" (2001). This is not to say that the movies are sequels or that Pignon is always the same character. He is played by a different actor each time—the first rotund and bumbling, the latest weedy and quiet. It is the name alone that survives from film to film, and *pignonisme* has come to stand for (and to stand up for) the besieged Frenchman—none too bright, seldom ambitious, obscurely happy with his lot but moved to indignation when his lot is trifled with. The Pignon role in "The Valet" goes to Gad Elmaleh, who, with his steady eyes, has a touch of Buster Keaton about him, though none of Keaton's ingenuity.

Pignon is the valet of the title. In the first minute, we see him gunning a red Ferrari. Seconds later, while we're still adjusting to the idea of this wealthy young man, we see him parking the car in front of a Paris hotel and handing the keys to the owner. This is typical Veber: he works at ridiculous speed, denting expectations almost before they are raised, and barrelling from one setup to the next. Within a few scenes, we are introduced to Pignon's parents; to his friend Émilie (Virginie Ledoyen), whom he wishes to marry but who treats him like a tolerable brother; to Levasseur (Daniel Auteuil), a fidgety billionaire; to Levasseur's wife (Kristin Scott Thomas), who, unlike the polar ice caps, gives no sign of melting; and to Levasseur's mistress, a supermodel named Elena (Alice Taglioni). When she is photographed next to Levasseur in the street, his wife threatens divorce, and with it financial ruin. Luckily, also in the photo is a random passerby: Pignon. Two worlds brush against each other, and there is your plot.

If you remove the Ferrari, there is nothing here that would have bemused Feydeau, and Veber films in general give a strong, time-puncturing hint of what it was like to sit in a Paris theatre in 1907 and watch a Feydeau farce. (Indeed, the unembarrassed shuffling of stereotypes goes back to Molière, who would have looked at Émilie's father, a hypochondriac doctor played by Michel Aumont, and smiled contentedly.) The solution to Levasseur's problem is that Pignon and Elena should be paid to become a couple—to live together for a month, to be visible in public, and thus to convince Mme. Levasseur that it was in fact her husband who was the blameless passerby. The geek, in short, must date the goddess.

To be honest, "The Valet" does not show Veber at his best. His palate for misunderstandings of every vintage is as refined as ever; what he has lost is his taste for human failing. In "The Dinner Game" nobody escaped censure. The very thought of its plot, with its high-spirited misanthropy—a club of worldly friends meet once a week, each of them competing to bring along the most complete idiot he can find—still makes me laugh. The new film, by contrast, shows alarming traces of softness. Elena, for example, metamorphoses into a honey who, far from doing her duty as a supermodel and stabbing Émilie with the heel of a Ferragamo shoe, helps to unite her with Pignon. And what the hell happens at the end? Veber doesn't wrap up the movie so much as bring it juddering to an emergency stop, as if his dashing narrative haste had, for once, threatened to slide out of control. Maybe all he needs is a short course of Billy Wilder to refresh his cynicism, although I worry that the American release of "The Valet" could put him off filmmaking for good. The problem is legal. At one point, the script refers to the model Inès de la Fressange, the last word in Gallic poise and grace. And how do the subtitles translate her name? "Naomi Campbell." If that isn't defamation, I don't know what is. ♦

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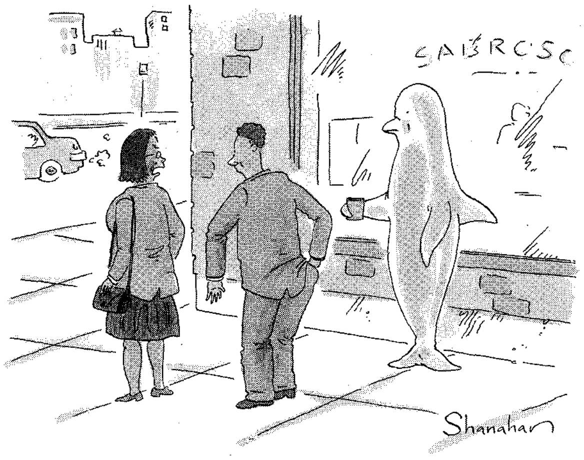
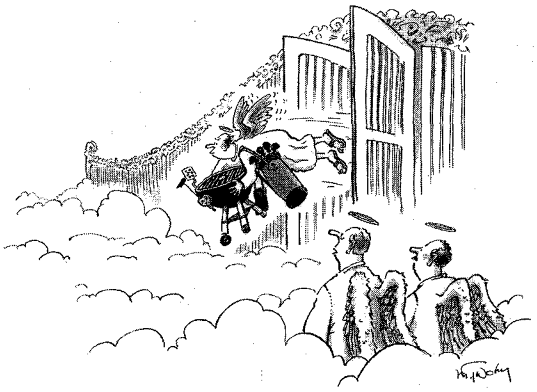
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Alex Gregory, must be received by Sunday, April 29th. Finalists in the April 16th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 14th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"If he's so damn intelligent, let him get a job."
Lawrence Wood, Chicago, Ill.



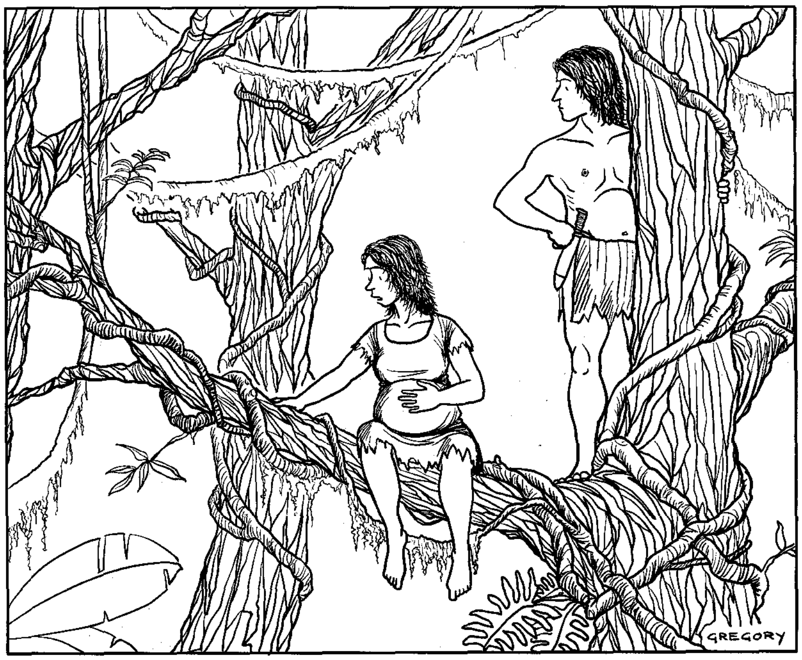
THE FINALISTS

"I guess membership does have its privileges."
Abdullah Abukusumo, Long Beach, Calif.

"So you can take it with you!"
Gale Davis, Zephyr Cove, Nev.

"Nobody brings what we really need—colorful, stylish clothes."
Eric Cooper, Santa Monica, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

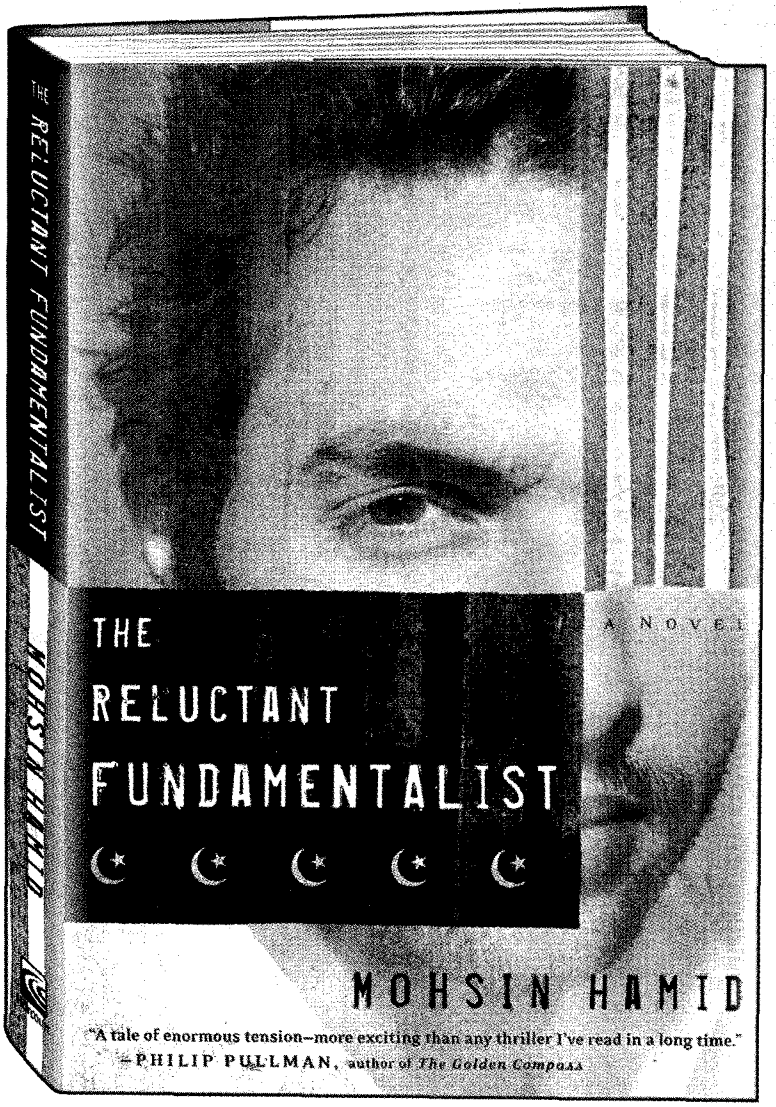


" "

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

"Elegant and chilling."

—*The New York Times Book Review*


THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST
MOHSIN HAMID
THE
RELUCTANT
FUNDAMENTALIST
A NOVEL
MOHSIN HAMID
"A tale of enormous tension—more exciting than any thriller I've read in a long time."
—PHILIP PULLMAN, author of The Golden Compass

"Searing and powerful."

—*The Namesake* director Mira Nair on "My Five Most Important Books," *Newsweek*

"Taut and accomplished . . . recalls a Dostoyevskian universe of humiliation, resentment and self-loathing."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Brilliantly written and well worth a read."

—*Seattle Times*

"A tale of enormous tension—more exciting than any thriller I've read in a long time."

—Philip Pullman, author of *The Golden Compass*

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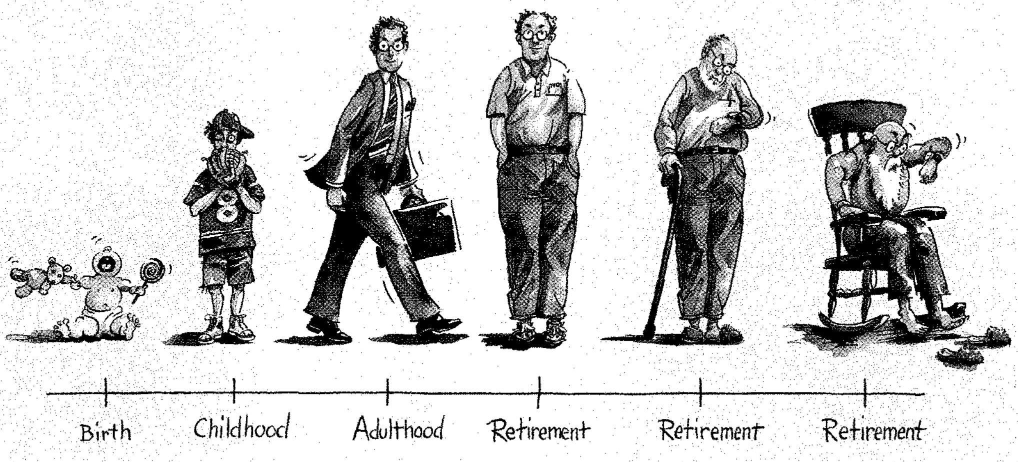
The generation that wouldn't trust anyone over 30

NEVER PLANNED ON A 30-YEAR RETIREMENT.



Average life expectancy in the U.S. has risen to an all-time high. Great news, except that the amount of money people put away for retirement isn't rising at all. How is our nation going to make sure its citizens have the money to retire? Allstate has a few ideas:

1. EXAMINE SOCIAL SECURITY
Americans will not be able to rely solely on Social Security for a comfortable retirement. In the future, it's projected to cover an increasingly smaller percentage of the average retirement. There's debate as to whether it should be repaired or replaced. But what's clear is we need to reform Social Security *now*.

2. BOOST RETIREMENT PLAN ENROLLMENT
Companies should continue looking for ways to encourage employee participation in 401(k) plans. One proven method to increase retirement savings is through company matches. Another is automatic enrollment—employees are signed up for savings plans when they join the company, unless they specifically opt out.

3. INCREASE PERSONAL SAVINGS
Ultimately, everyone is responsible for their own retirement. It's why we support laws that reward people for saving. Tax-advantaged savings vehicles, like annuities and IRAs, are two examples of products that can help allay Baby Boomers' biggest fear: living to see the well run dry.

Let's save retirement by saving for retirement.
THAT'S ALLSTATE'S STAND

Allstate®
You're in good hands.

Auto Home Life Retirement

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